MOLINOFF

Also by Maurice Bedel:

JEROME

OR THE LATITUDE OF LOVE

MOLINOFF

OR THE COUNT IN THE KITCHEN

BY MAURICE BEDEL

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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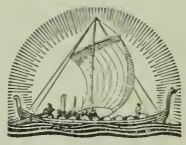

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MOLINOFF

I

When Monsieur Diego Cortés, a planter from Cochabamba in Bolivia, bought Fontecreuse, his ambition was to turn it into an estate worthy of the market price of coffee.

He summoned an architect from Monaco and placed in his hands the château of the Comtes de Maulny, with its finely proportioned façade, its balconies of delicate ironwork, and its coats of arms over the doorway. The architect transformed this old-fashioned rubbish into a sumptuous residence, budding with allegorical figures, and garlanded with flowers, horns of plenty, and gilded balustrades.

Thus Touraine acquired a perfect little imitation of the Casino at Monte Carlo.

The dovecot magically became a fountain; the summer-house, where the daughters of the Comtes de Maulny had read and dreamed, was enclosed in scarlet, turquoise, amber, and emerald

panes, to shelter the storage batteries and the dynamo.

An Italian landscape gardener was imported to give the classic French park, laid out in austere lines, the careless grace of an English countryside. The pool was stretched into an oval; the statues of Pomona and Ceres were despoiled of their patina of moss and lichen by a steam bath; and presently their bleached elegance presided over a double mosaic of houseleek, coleus, and lobelia. The old-fashioned rose bushes were replaced by prize-winning varieties, called *Président Raoul Péret, Madame Alexandre Varennes,* or *In Memory of Maître Labori;* the names, to be sure, were imposing, but the flowers had no smell. Winches uprooted the trees and dragged them into new positions, breaking up the geometrical monotony of the quincunx. On the lawns, clumps of redwoods and negundo maples were scattered in a charming disorder. Unfortunately, it was already the month of July, and most of these exotics withered and gradually died. But the landscape gardener insisted that they were husbanding their strength for a richer growth in the spring.

On the completion of these works, one of his assistants, named Paolo, was delegated to stay at Fontecreuse, with Mme. Paolo and their daughter Pia, to perpetuate the work of the master.

M. Cortés was a man of ideas. His conceptions of art had been formed in the staterooms of trans-Atlantic liners between South America and Europe, the lobby of the Claridge, and the inner chambers of Monte Carlo. When it became necessary to find an interior decorator, his wide acquaintanceship in the various spas of Europe yielded a young man of good family, whom hard times, after the war, had reduced to dealing in furniture. This youth realized that the moment had come to justify the expectations of his backers, and the complete contents of his shop in the Rue du Colisée were shipped to Fontecreuse. He explained to his new employer that the furniture left by the Comtes de Maulny was shabby, worm-eaten, and out of style. So, for several days, his men scurried busily up and down the wide stairs, lugging Empire chairs, inlaid secretaries, and chests of drawers to the attic or the servants' quarters. In their place appeared

massive pieces of neo-Munich, which produced an impression of solid durability by a clever veneering of mahogany on pine, or a dazzling plate of gold leaf over tin. The entrance hall was lined with imitation marble. The library was furnished with imitation oak, upholstered with leather; and a complete collection of Havana cigars, in coloured boxes, replaced the seventeenth-century classics on the shelves.

Presently a rumour spread through the countryside that the Bolivian planter was using black labour to an accompaniment of barbaric music. The truth back of this story was that, when the conservatory had been turned into a ball-room, Joe Jackson, the leader of Jackson's Coloured Jazz Band, had been ordered to appear with his troupe. For two nights and a day, Joe's men had tested the acoustics of Fontecreuse. Cornices were rounded off where they interfered with the echoes of the percussion instruments; and at the request of the saxophonist, an early Gobelin tapestry was taken down. M. Cortés demanded the best of everything, and by that he meant what cost the most. From this point of view

he was fully satisfied with the results obtained.

Being a good Christian, he was unwilling to leave the hotel at Tours, where he had been stopping, and move into Fontecreuse, before the blessing of heaven had been invoked on his new home. But to guarantee the fruitfulness of the blessing, he felt that it should come from a high dignitary of the Church. He explained this problem to his architect, who scratched his head, reflected a moment, and finally promised to provide a bishop.

That same evening, a handsome prelate, robed in violet, stepped from a limousine, at the foot of the stone steps leading up to the château.

It was Monseigneur Pinto Silvares da Costa, the titular Bishop of Mossamedes.

This altogether delightful ecclesiastic divided his time between the charming penitents of his Portuguese chapel, on Avenue Victor Hugo, and his estate in Touraine, where brilliant and pious receptions were held every Saturday afternoon during the summer season.

With elegant piety he sprinkled the drawing-room, bedrooms, bathrooms, and particularly the

lift, which was subject to weaknesses that might prove fatal. This done, he assured M. Cortés that it would be a pleasure to receive him at his modest country house, where Providence, he explained, allowed him to enjoy a few months' rest each year on the banks of the Loire.

"You will meet the best society of Touraine there," he said. "Lady Bridgewater, Dr. Arturo Lopez, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, the Peña y Solars, the two sons of the Pasha, Monsieur Ben Daoud ——"

"Who is he?" interrupted M. Cortés.

"A Frenchman."

"Then there are really some Frenchmen left in the neighbourhood?"

"He is almost the only one I know."

M. Cortés promised to come and, kissing the amethyst ring the Bishop offered, escorted His Grace to his car.

All precautions having thus been taken, both on earth and in heaven, M. Cortés was at last ready to take active possession of his château.

On the same day that he left Tours, he arranged to have Mme. Cortés, who had remained

until then at the Claridge, transported to Fontecreuse.

Mme. Cortés, nourished from childhood on candied pineapple and cane sugar, weighed some three hundred pounds. She led a tranquil existence in an arm-chair, which had been designed especially to accommodate her bulk and which she never left, even to take the train. She travelled, like a trunk, in the baggage-car, preferring its ample proportions and the conductor's conversation to the narrowness of the compartments and the scowls of lean passengers.

Hence it was in this contrivance that she was deposited on the station platform at Azay-le-Rideau. There she was hoisted to a trailer behind her husband's motor and driven to Fontecreuse, where she was installed in a vast room on the second floor, overlooking the main gate and giving her a view of the fountain and the rose gardens.

Mme. Cortés was an affable matron, always ready to smile so long as her stomach was not empty. She spent her days nibbling sweets in the company of a parrot named Don Pedro and an

elderly nun from Bolivia, Sister Encarnación. And, as time dragged when she was not eating, she told them both their fortunes with cards.

Having always lived hitherto in hotels and on steamships, M. and Mme. Cortés now had to set about gathering a staff of servants. M. Cortés volunteered to take charge of this matter: a messenger at the Ambassadeurs found him a valet; the woman in the cloak-room at Ciro's produced a maid, a charming girl, enveloped in the most delicate of perfumes; and a cousin, who was closing up her house on Avenue Hoche to return to Venezuela, bequeathed him her Russian cook.

This young man impressed his new master and mistress at their first interview. His good manners appeared to be second nature, his bearing was poised, and for a cook he had the most beautiful hands in the world.

He replied to the Bolivian's questions by informing them that his name was Molinoff; that he could tame wild horses, and speak Russian, Spanish, Italian, and English; that he had some talent as a musician; and that his chief delight was in the company of good society.

This description left Mme. Cortés noticeably uneasy:

"But what about cooking?" she asked. "Weren't you the cook at Avenue Hoche?"

"Avenue Hoche? Yes, of course. . . . That is to say, the meals were sent in from Pommier's. I heated them up. I garnished the lobster and stirred the champagne in the salad. The dishes came to us dead; I gave them colour and movement—in a word, I gave them life, Madame."

Mme. Cortés lifted her heavy lids and gazed at him with impatience:

"That's not cooking," she declared. "That's fancy work. Is this all you know, young man?"

"Ah, Madame!" he exclaimed reproachfully. He stepped back into the centre of the room and, assuming the air of a Prime Minister, drew up a sample menu for her, detailing the recipes he would use, suggesting this for an entrée and that to follow the roast. He folded back his sleeves over his wrists and set about the concoction of an original pastry. He beat eggs, peeled fruit, and distributed each in bowls; he kneaded a dough, buttered cake pans . . .

"In the days when I was chief cook at the Métropole, in Geneva," he began.

He explained that he had practised his art in that famous hotel, where he had long been chief cook, and that once, during the sessions of the League of Nations, M. Albert Thomas had sent for him and congratulated him on a roast young pig, stuffed with truffles and garnished with goose-livers, which surpassed anything he had ever been offered by his own constituents.

"Do you mean to say," said M. Cortés, "that such a famous statesman congratulated you in person?"

And, flattered at the prospect of being served by a man who had won the praises of M. Albert Thomas, the planter from Cochabamba hired Molinoff on the spot.

II

The arrival of these foreigners brought consternation to the neighbouring châteaux. For a dubious outlander to take the succession of the Maulnys was a sign of the times. Vows were made not to receive him, and his name was not mentioned again.

The war, by removing their sons, had turned the old families in on themselves. They lived on their estates, protected from external realities by the boundary lines of their property. For it is sons, rather than daughters, that accustom parents to the constant renewal of life; and at Beauchêne, Plessis-Puçay, and Thouard, there were no longer any sons: the Marne and the Yser had swallowed them up, Verdun had devoured them.

Separated from Fontecreuse by a thousand acres of forest, Beauchêne had not yet heard of Diego Cortés. Beauchêne was a gracious château, pure Touraine, slumbering on the banks of one

of the tributaries of the Indre. There M. d'Eglantier and his daughters had led an existence unmarked by any event since the death of his two sons. The old customs of before the war had been retained: luncheon was served at half past eleven, and dinner at seven; summer and winter alike the clocks registered sun time; the house was lighted by kerosene oil lamps; and every Saturday for thirty-five years the same cook had prepared a beef stew, which was eaten cold Sunday noon, because of the late mass that she attended. Whenever any member of the family wished to go into the village, César, the coachman-gardener, harnessed the horses, and then put on his blue livery with copper buttons and high hat before climbing to his place on the seat.

News from the outside world trickled into Beauchêne each day through the pages of the Royalist newspaper, *Action Française*. The news was invariably pessimistic. The editorials were written in the wintriest of ink; never so much as a paragraph in a fair-weather hue; not the palest ray of hope that things would work out all right in the end, and that France would re-

cover from its wounds of the war. Even that great reconciler, the Church, it was pointed out, had abandoned the country: the Pope had excommunicated the Royalists, and Charles Maurras, their leader, had advocated resistance to the Pope.

From his daily reading, M. d'Eglantier had reached the conclusion that France was hurtling towards another revolution. Had he been thinking of revolutions in customs and traditions, he might not have been far wrong. But, for this gentle and peaceful old man, revolution meant the Terror and the guillotine. For it is one of the misfortunes of the old to foresee the worst; it is their only justification of their weakness.

"My dears," he remarked frequently to his daughters, "France will soon disappear from the map of Europe."

But his daughters did not believe this for a moment, for they were not yet twenty, it was midsummer, and the air quivered with the fragrance of sage and the chirping of crickets; because France, to them, meant the fields they saw carpeted with daisies and the woods that smelled

of strawberries; and, finally, because woods and fields, strawberries and daisies could not disappear over night from the map of Europe.

Anne and Françoise d'Eglantier had grown reconciled to a life without marriage. For marriage becomes impossible in a country where young men have preferred the feats of war to those of love. But the two sisters looked forward eagerly to life, picturing it as a long series of happy days, to be spent, in summer, on the tennis court, in the garden, or on horseback; and, in winter, at the fireside or the piano. In the fall, they would embroider at home, or ride to hounds in the forest of Chinon.

Besides these activities, Anne, who was the elder, had recently been visited by the Royalist faith of the *Action Française*. To be sure, she did not share her father's pessimistic outlook; but for a young girl destined for spinsterhood, a devotion to the cause may be the source of great spiritual consolation, for it provides her at once with someone to whom she may offer herself: the King. Thus, Anne might have chosen far worse. In this new loyalty all the ardour of

her passionate nature found relief. She scolded the village curé because he seemed lukewarm in his expectation of the return of the King, and more inclined to obey the Pope than Maurras. She distributed copies of the *Action Française* among her father's farmhands, and solicited contributions for the Joan of Arc fund, which it was hoped would go over a million. At the eager freshness of her voice, these good farmer-socialists of Touraine handed her their half-franc pieces. But when the elections came, they continued to vote red, which was more in harmony with their secret convictions than the traditional white of the royal family of France.

Françoise had no bent for politics. The energy of her eighteen years, which was denied its natural expression in love, found its outlet in physical activity. In her arms and legs, movement lay coiled, as in the spring of a watch. She would open the piano, play a few bars of a valse by Chopin, interrupt herself suddenly, jump on her bicycle, and circle the park. It was she who drove the break to market at Azay every Saturday morning, while César sat beside her in ap-

prehensive silence. It was she who dragged her sister to the tennis courts when the heat rose in waves from the gravel; or to the hunt, in winter, when the horses' hoofs rang on the frozen earth. Ignorant of the golden mean, she did all things with intensity. Yet she gave the impression of a child, with her clear blue eyes, her fragile grace, and her hair that shimmered like ripened wheat.

The air of cheerfulness created at Beauchêne by Anne and Françoise had made it the gathering place for the society of the neighbourhood. After the death of their mother, the two girls had kept up the tradition of her Tuesday at-homes. It was not that they derived any pleasure from it, but it had become a habit, like the beef stew on Sunday and the trip to market on Saturday. Winter and summer, every Tuesday afternoon found them at Beauchêne, playing the rôle of mistresses of the house. They played it without enthusiasm, like young students at the Français, eager to sparkle in Géraldy but forced to recite the grave lines of Corneille. They received in the little drawing-room known among their friends as "the bus." It was, in fact, long and narrow

like a bus, and the guests sat in two rows, facing each other, between a door into the hall at one end and a tall French window, opening on the garden, at the other.

The elderly Marquis de Servanes arrived in his brougham. No longer able to afford a coachman, he drove himself, not from the coachman's seat but from within, lowering the glass. This was one more proof of the cruelty of the times. Françoise never failed to announce: "Here comes Uncle Servanes in his closed car."

The La Huppes, driving over from their château at Plessis-Puçay, usually appeared just before or just after him.

The Comtesse de La Huppe fluttered into the room like an eddy of wind, kissed her cousin d'Eglantier, whom she always called "my dear," picked at Anne's hair, which was drawn too tightly around the head for her taste, and dropping into an arm-chair, began to fan herself; for she was forever in a flurry of excitement.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "what *did* you think of Léon Daudet's article in the *Action Française* this morning? The Minister of Hygiene is get-

ting raked over the coals—incidentally, I don't understand what it's all about—and it seems that the Minister of War —— Leave the room a minute, girls. . . ."

Anne and Françoise stepped out into the garden.

" —— that the minister of War has become the lover of Chicherin's mistress. She is a German, you know, and on intimate terms with Stresemann. Really a delightful situation, and thoroughly characteristic of republican governments. . . . Anne and Françoise, you may come back now."

Her husband nodded his head and murmured, "Quite so. . . ." It was the only opinion she allowed him to hold.

Brevet-General de La Pommelière and the Comte and Comtesse Le Fort were also members of the circle. The General, who was a connoisseur of gardens and orchards, usually appeared with a basket of white grapes, or geranium cuttings, or some new variety of bitter apple, depending on the season. The Comte Le Fort brought his zest for bridge; the Comtesse her

music. She would sing, without request, *A Virgin's Prayer* or the *Gondolier's Love Song*. Music, she explained, was an anodyne for her maternal grief, for she too had lost two sons in the war. Françoise played her accompaniments, glancing desperately at Anne under the Comtesse's uplifted double chin.

Both girls detested these Tuesdays, consecrated to the cherished habits of others; for they were the only day in the week when it was useless to look for anything unexpected to happen.

But the next day they made up for their boredom by the vigour with which they played tennis or the recklessness with which they rode through the forest. Mounting Belgian Hare and Dragon II, the horses that on Saturday were harnessed to the break, they galloped under the pines. The air was fragrant with resin and honey, and trembled with the wings of insects. Less than this would have convinced the two sisters that life was fair, and that its delights had chosen Beauchêne for their meeting-ground.

III

M. Cortés had only a vague notion as to the class in society to which these people from Beauchêne, Plessis-Puçay, and Thouard, belonged. He had caught a few glimpses of their houses set deep in the woods, and had passed the owners along the roads, driving their own carriages and shaking hands with the peasants. His valet and cook seemed to him more distinguished in appearance. Moreover, the Bishop of Mossamedes had made no mention of these families in his list of the celebrities of the neighbourhood. No doubt, concluded M. Cortés, they were retired farmers.

Hence, when he decided to hold a housewarming at Fontecreuse, it did not occur to him to invite them.

Instead, he hired a professional organizer of social events from Paris. This gentleman, who had gone bankrupt from entertaining his friends

with an extravagance they had since forgotten, now arranged teas, receptions, balls, formal and informal evenings, and surprise parties, in every variety of good and bad taste, to meet the requirements of those who had grown rich from the war.

Receptions, in his catalogue, were divided into different classes. M. Cortés ordered the First Class *de luxe* with all accessories, insisting particularly on the quality of the guests, whose names must have figured at least several times in the social columns of the *Figaro*. The organizer had his lists, and it was an easy matter to select from them a hundred personages. His fee, to be sure, amounted to several thousand pounds sterling, but at that price one could have a dethroned king, a maharajah, members of the Spanish nobility and of the Hungarian Jockey Club, the Ambassador Plenipotentiary from Macedonia, and a handful of French marquis and counts, whose titles were guaranteed. Besides these there would be the Bolivian colony, who were all friends of M. Cortés, and a sprinkling of neighbours from Touraine, whom Mon-

seigneur da Costa was asked to pick out.

The house-warming was held, and was eminently successful. Loud-speakers announced the guests, with their titles and decorations. Nearly everybody was already acquainted, as they had all met at similar affairs under the same auspices. But, to make sure that everything went off smoothly, the organizer acted as a member of the family, standing in the receiving line beside M. Cortés, whispering to him what to say and what not to say. Everything had been foreseen by this social statesman: even tactless remarks were classified and avoided.

Yet two shadows managed to cross the brilliant scene: the ex-King of Thessaly allowed himself to be announced as the Comte de Larissa, and the maharajah appeared in dinner clothes. M. Cortés was naturally much vexed by these mishaps, and apologized to his Bolivian friends, to whom he had promised a real king and a rajah in silken robes and white turban fastened with an emerald clasp.

But, aside from this, everything was perfect. The guests were entertained by a ballet from

Stockholm, an act from the latest New York musical comedy, *Blondes Prefer Money,* a troupe of Caucasian singers, and fire-works designed by Luigi Pilazzoli; in a word, it was a real old-fashioned French house-warming.

Meanwhile, early in the evening, as Balieff's singers were striking up the chorus to the *Volga Boat Song,* Molinoff had fled, leaving the kitchen in the hands of his temporary substitutes. The familiar melodies of his own land, and the nostalgic voices of his compatriots, had been more than he could stand. He sought refuge, at first, in the depths of the park, but the music pursued him there and overtook him; so he fled farther.

The moon was dropping an opalescent glow from a cloudless sky as he set off down the road that skirted the banks of the Indre. From time to time he pulled up a sprig of mint and crushed the leaves in his fingers to cool his burning palms. His long shadow glided ahead of him, and he clung to it for companionship in the panic that had gripped him. In the remoteness of the night, only his shadow seemed like a sympathetic

friend. Once, when the screen of trees blotted out the clear strip of road, and the shadow vanished, he retraced his steps, joined his shadow once more, and henceforth—not to lose it a second time—followed the little pools of moonlight that filtered through the leaves.

In fleeing from Balieff and his singers, it was really Russia and his own past that he fled; and he did not pause until he had come to the little stone bridge that spans the Indre a short distance from Fontecreuse.

Seating himself on the parapet, he dangled his legs over the river, and tried to forget his distress in watching the flickering of the moon on the black surface of the water. But the music, obeying the whims of the breeze, reached him even there, sometimes muffled in the dark mass of trees, sometimes sharp and rhythmical, as if thrown down from the glittering stars.

Russia, at that moment, enveloped him; his memories had hunted him down and ensnared him. And, in the end, he gave himself up to them.

While two frogs pursued each other among the reeds below him, croaking in plaintive tones,

or scrambling up the slippery bank and plunging repeatedly into the water, he retraced the thread of his past.

At thirty, Count Ivan Molinoff had already lived so many lives that this moment of peace in a forgotten corner of France, lulled by the murmur of a summer night, may well have seemed the first he had found along his adventurous path.

The war had torn him from the Corps of Pages, at St. Petersburg, while he had been still a boy, and had sent him to flounder in the campaign of the Masurian Lakes. Thence he had emerged covered with wounds, glory, and a reeking slime, which had penetrated his blood and bequeathed him a lingering fever. This misfortune won him the attention of the nurses at Riga, from whom he learned that his Byronic profile would surely bring him success in life. This apprenticeship lasted a little over a year; at the end of that time, he left the hospital with the rank of captain.

Thus he came to believe that war had more

good sides than bad, and he acquired a strong taste for it, as well as for cards and champagne. He took part in all the major offensives, but especially those against the Austrians. Lemberg, that entrancing city populated with fair Jewesses, was captured, lost, and recaptured. Battles were fought in fields yellow with waving narcissus; the Russian cavalry pursued the enemy at a gentle trot, holding out their sabres to catch the bouquets of flowers offered by Galician maidens along the roadside. For a young and gallant man, what existence could equal that? Unfortunately, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk put an end to this enchantment.

But Molinoff could not resign himself to remaining unhorsed. Nor was there any reason now for him to return home; since he had learned that the peasants, after murdering his father and mother, had divided his family's estate and possessions among themselves. Hence he joined the army of the dissatisfied, and took command of a hundred vagabonds with the rank of colonel.

These men knew no discipline but the heat of their own desires. In the noble aim of establish-

ing order and restoring the belongings of the dispossessed, towns were pillaged and Jews shot down against the walls of their houses. Molinoff was not built to witness such cruelties with indifference: while they were being perpetrated, he galloped across the fields composing elegies, and resumed command of his men only when the machine guns had cooled and the bayonets had been wiped clean. Yet, as it turned out, he was ill-rewarded for such laudable disinterestedness.

One day, during the course of a pogrom, he fell into the hands of a hostile troop, disappointed at finding itself forestalled in robbery and massacre. He was thrown into a local prison, to be dispatched the next morning; but while his captors were waiting for the Chinese executioner, who was to accommodate him with a slow death, he was aided by the jailer's wife to escape. It was not the first time that the habitual caress in his glance, at the sight of a woman, had been of use to him.

Eventually he had made his way to the foothills of the Carpathians, living during his travels

on grasshoppers, sunflower seeds, and stoic principles.

Such was the current of his reflections as he dangled his heels over this tiny French river. The frog by now had ceased its croaking, having obtained the satisfaction of its desires. The Russian melodies no longer charged the forest air with their grievous yearning.

Instead, the shadows trembled under the assaults of the brasses, and the deepening slumber of nature was jolted by the crash of cymbals. Guided by the jazz band, Molinoff's memories turned unconsciously to his days of exile: to Budapest, where he had practised every trade open to a handsome young man experienced in no trade; to Prague, where he had washed dishes in a restaurant; and to Vienna, where he had blown a hunting horn for the attractions on the Prater.

Driven by that restless spirit that had sent Tolstoy out to tramp the dusty highways—as well as by the Viennese police—he had moved on from there to Switzerland. But in Switzerland

he found the best jobs already taken by former members of the Duma and Kerensky's cabinet, who had arrived ahead of him. Not an opening was left as doorman in a hotel: colonels and generals had monopolized the uniformed employments. Not a place as valet: ex-officials of the Imperial government had reserved this occupation for themselves. So, once more, he had turned to washing dishes, this time at the Métropole in Geneva, where he was soon taken under the wing of the chief bowler, a Russian émigré like himself. With this patronage he was advanced swiftly to the dignity of mixing sauces, then of baking pastry, and finally was honoured with the authority of chief cook. The job was a profitable one, and Molinoff displayed exceptional talent; but Paris beckoned to him.

He had always understood that the French loaned money to Russians at a reasonable interest. He planned to borrow merely a hundred thousand francs, secured by a mortgage on his ancestral estates, and payable on the downfall of the Soviets. With this intention, he left Switzerland. On stepping off the train in Paris, he asked at

once to be directed to a bank that specialized in Russian loans; he was sent to the Boulevard des Italiens. But before he had finished his introductory speech, the teller of the department of mortgages and securities snapped the wicket shut in his face. Molinoff tumbled from the pinnacle of his dream to the level of a half-dozen Swiss francs that still jingled in his pocket.

The next day, through the interpreter of the Association for the Aid of Victims of the Russian Revolution, he was supplied with a job.

You may recall a young man in dress clothes and opera hat, who was to be seen day and night on the Paris boulevards, followed by a servant carrying his Inverness cape. The young man pointed with a gold-headed walking-stick at the sign of a popular tailor. That was Molinoff. But one evening he was mistaken by a middle-aged American woman, who had spent the day in the Ritz bar, for a fashionable gentleman leaving the opera. She carried him off to supper at Maxim's, where he directed the head waiter to put them at the best table, and quietly ate enough to carry

him through the week. The next morning the tailor, informed of the escapade by the cape-bearer, took back the suit, the hat, and the stick, and turned Molinoff out.

Being Russian and knowing how to blow a trumpet, he next joined the Russian Mountaineer's Band, at the Neuilly Fair. But nature had given him a hearty appetite, and he grew lean puffing at his trumpet. To remedy this situation, he registered as cook in a Paris employment agency, and it was there that M. Cortés' cousin had discovered him.

This lady soon realized, however, that her new cook was much too handsome to be wasted over a stove. She pampered him by having her meals sent in from a nearby restaurant. Out of sheer conscientiousness, Molinoff touched them up a bit; for officially he was expected to prepare only her breakfasts and to deign to serve them to her in bed. He took advantage of this situation to learn Spanish. But presently his employer, or rather, his new friend, left France. Molinoff wept. And his tears on this occasion were the most genuine he had shed since childhood.

Thus his journey through the past brought him back once more to the stone coping of the little bridge over the Indre.

The music was silenced now; the headlights of a file of motors, crawling away from Fontecreuse, flashed in the forest and streaked the sky with pale gleams. When the last klaxon had despoiled the sweet French night with its snarl, he returned to the kitchen, his heart eased of all bitterness.

What difference did it make, whether he were here or elsewhere? . . . Here, at least, he had found friends, in the trees, the moon, and the river.

IV

The last of the Roman candles having sputtered into darkness and the house-warming concluded, M. Cortés remembered that the races at Deauville had been run off more than a fortnight before.

At this season of the year, nothing in the world could have kept him from Biarritz, whither he was drawn by the secret hope of being presented to the King of Spain. He accordingly abandoned Fontecreuse, taking with him his valet, his chauffeur, and the charming young maid, who was rapidly growing neurasthenic under the effects of country life and Molinoff's indifference. He delegated to his cook the task of providing for Mme. Cortés' comfort.

From the morning the Bolivian drove away, the relations between Molinoff and Mme. Cortés, the nun, and the parrot, were uniformly excellent. He took pains that the ladies saw little

of him, for the misfortunes of life had taught him the value of silence and discretion. He appeared in the morning to receive the orders for the day, and to propose a menu. Mme. Cortés, overflowing her chair like a pastry that had been baked in its mould, nodded approval to all of his suggestions, provided there were enough sweets on the list. The nun would fall heir to her leavings, and the parrot would scrabble for the crumbs. After this interview, Molinoff was not seen except at meal times, for it was he who brought up the tray. He carried his taste for decoration to the point of ostentation; and Mme. Cortés was touched by his attentions. He never offered her a dish that was not garnished with real flowers, and flanked with symbolic scrolls of butter or carved truffles. Pastries took the form of Bavarian châteaux, which he brought upstairs balanced on his fingertips, lest the meringue capital of a column, or a crenellated roof of nougat, be left behind in the lift.

Pia, the gardener's daughter, acted as his scullery-maid and took charge of the housework.

Pia was a docile creature of fifteen or six-

teen, swarthy and greasy-skinned—obviously born for menial tasks and a life of servitude. She lighted the fire; she washed the dishes, she peeled the vegetables, and plucked the fowls. Molinoff seldom spoke to her; but her eyes followed him about as long as he was in her sight. She fell into the habit of polishing his boots and washing his linen, which he allowed her to do. She was the tidy ant in the vast kitchen where Molinoff lived and slept in the disorder of an army camp.

He never left Fontecreuse. From the first he had ordered his supplies from Azay-le-Rideau by telephone. The evening train brought them each day, and Paolo went to the station to fetch them.

This was the extent of his relations with Paolo. But the Italian, who sold most of the vegetables from their kitchen garden in the village, feared this aloof and taciturn Russian, who was clothed in the confidence of their master. He addressed him as "Signore," and bowed before him. Mme. Paolo never entered the kitchen without scrubbing her feet vigorously on the mat.

Luncheon served, Molinoff strolled in the park, pausing to bend over a rose or to christen the birds with the names he had known them by as a child. He smoked cigarettes by the dozen, tossing each of them away after the first three puffs. Occasionally he walked as far as the gate, meditatively watched the river flowing by on the other side of the road, and then resumed his solitary circling of the pool.

But one afternoon his reverie led him to the edge of the park, separated from the forest only by a shallow ditch. He hurdled this obstacle, and entering at random one of the straight, green alleys kept open for hunting, strolled under the trees. Once launched in one of these alleys, one is drawn irresistibly to the end, where another branches off, and the spell is renewed. Penetrating ever deeper into the forest, occasionally snapping a birch switch he had broken off a young tree, Molinoff wandered thus for a long time.

Presently he emerged on an open road. The road skirted a stone wall; and from behind the

wall he heard the laughter and sudden exclamations of two girls playing tennis.

"Do you want to change sides?" asked one of the voices.

"I should like to," replied the other. "This sun is blinding me."

He stopped abruptly, enchanted by the music of these light, French voices; he closed his eyes and listened. He heard the thud of the balls against the strings, an "Oh!" of despair, and then a triumphant voice that cried, "Out! Game!" Through the stones of the ancient wall, he pictured the lifting of sun-tanned arms, the white rushes across the court, and the sudden leap of the one that was playing net. No masculine voice broke the charm.

Molinoff sat down on the mossy bank, his brow between his hands. Over his head two squirrels scrambled from branch to branch, with little squeaks and a rustling of leaves. The air was quiet and heavy. The distant cooing of pigeons modulated the warm silence.

"This," he reflected, "is happiness."

Bits of sentences fluttered over the wall:

"I don't know what is the matter with me today," said one of the voices.

"Something must be," replied the other. "Your mind is certainly not on tennis."

Or perhaps:

"I think my racket needs restringing."

"Why don't you say the net is too high?"

He followed the game, taking sides with the one whose mind was not on tennis. He repeated the phrases he had heard with delight. He who thought himself calloused by misfortune felt tears rising to his eyes at the voices of two unknown and invisible girls.

The enchantment lasted a long time. But, as the sun dropped behind the forest, he suddenly remembered his empty saucepans waiting for dinner. He rose with a sigh and turned towards Fontecreuse. But he had not gone more than half a dozen steps when one of the voices exclaimed:

"Françoise! What *are* you thinking about?"

And a tennis ball rolled across his path, halting him as the golden apple of Hippomenes halted Atalanta.

He picked the ball up and held it for a mo-

ment in the palm of his hand, caressing it as he might have caressed a bird that had fallen from its nest. Then he touched it lightly to his lips, and was about to throw it back, charged with the message of his gratitude, when a gate opened in the wall.

A slender figure in white, bare-armed and bare-headed, her light hair caught loosely in a blue fillet, ran out breathless and laughing, but stopped in confusion at sight of a stranger.

"Excuse me," she stammered, "really I didn't . . ."

She took the ball shyly from his hand and disappeared once more behind the gate.

Molinoff heard whispered laughter; then the play began again:

". . . thirty . . . forty . . . game!"

V

"Well," explained Françoise for the tenth time since the afternoon before, "he is tall, and that's all I noticed."

"Yes, I know," insisted Anne, "you have already told me that. But what is he *like?*"

"Like? . . . Why . . . there was something tragic about him. Pale complexion, black coat . . ."

"Black hands, too?"

"Of course not. His hands were long and white and slender. Hands that —— Now what are you laughing at?"

"First you tell me that you didn't notice anything about him and then you describe the shape of his finger-nails. I think myself he must have been a tramp."

"I think he was . . . he was . . ."

"Prince Charming?"

"Well, why not?"

Neither of them mentioned the subject again, but curiosity had taken possession of them like a restive demon.

This was on Tuesday.

The General arrived for tea that day with a basket of mushrooms. "The first of the season," he announced. Comtesse Le Fort volunteered to sing something from *Faust*. When she reached the words, "How I long to know who that young man was!" Françoise struck three false chords and could barely keep from crying out: "So do I!" They had to start from the beginning once more, and all of Marguerite's torment passed now through Françoise's heart.

Ranged opposite each other in the bus, the gentlemen were criticizing the modern age. It was a habit they could no more have done without than the sugar in their tea. Yet the tone of the Royalist paper had grown more sanguine these days. Léon Daudet's assurance that the solemn hour of reparations was at hand, and his promise that fitting punishment would be meted out to all traitors to the King, should surely have bred patience, in his followers, to endure the

insolence of peasant landowners and the impertinence of the radical tax-collector. Yet only M. de La Huppe, who was usually reluctant to express any opinion in his wife's presence, maintained that everything was working out for the best.

"Just a few more days," he said, with the decision of a man who knows what he is talking about.

". . . before France will be betrayed into the hands of foreigners," added M. d'Eglantier.

". . . and our bodies will be dangling from the branches of our trees," concluded the Comte Le Fort.

The General, constitutionally good-natured, remarked that nothing was lost and that meanwhile everyone should cultivate his own garden; and, as an item of good news, he explained that Vilmorin, the seed merchant, had just perfected a new variety of pink, with a second blooming, called the *Locarno,* which ——

"But, General," exploded Mme. de La Huppe. "What can you be thinking of? The *Locarno!* Do you call that a second blooming?"

Her indignation deepened the natural purplish flush of her cheeks, and the General glanced apprehensively about for a safe means of retreat.

"My dear lady," he began, "when I said, 'cultivate one's garden' . . ."

"One's garden! one's garden! . . . But you have to have a garden first! Plessis-Puçay is falling into ruins; you can look through the chapel wall like a piece of lace; my husband's valet is holding us up for five hundred francs, and I suppose . . ."

Having listed her troubles, she blamed them all on the radical administration under Herriot, mispronouncing his name as Henriot.

"But will he pay for all these things? Tell me that, General, will he pay? We shall have to do as the Maulnys did: sell Plessis-Puçay to a foreigner, yes, a foreigner, like that mongrel at Fontecreuse, who will rip the house apart and put up a casino for his mistresses and his niggers. Armand realizes as well as I do that we shall have to come to it."

M. de La Huppe puckered his eyebrows and rocked his head gently; this was his way of an-

swering neither yes nor no. But, turning towards the General, he repeated:

"Just a few more days. . . ."

Whereupon he proposed a game of bridge.

M. de Servanes not yet having arrived to make up the fourth, Françoise was led to the sacrifice.

Meanwhile, Molinoff was reconnoitring the road for the entrance to Beauchêne.

By following the wall from the point where the ball had come over, he was certain that he would not lose track of the house, and that eventually he would come on the main gate into the park. At that point he counted on making an ally of the porter, who would surely tell him the girls' first names. Detailed information as to how their governess spent her time would be merely a matter of the right tip. He folded a twenty-franc note—all that was left of his month's pay—between his fingers; for he had learned that well placed baksheesh will loosen any tongue and open any door. Reflecting on this fortunate aspect of human nature, his step quickened; a world of possibilities lay pressed in that crisp

bank-note. Yet it was not much that he hoped to learn: a pair of names, a pair of ages, and perhaps the colour of certain hair—a handful of facts to serve as green isles in the ocean of bitterness over which his fate was driving him. He would learn at what hours the sisters went out, and would see them pass by; they would become his friends, like the road, the trees, and the river. The incident of the tennis ball might even be repeated.

He was already rehearsing the words he would use this time in returning the ball, when the stone wall ended and he found himself staring through an open gate. It was the main entrance to Beauchêne.

But, unfortunately, there was no porter; merely a glimpse of the towers of a château beyond a bend in the drive, which was rutted from the recent passage of carriages. He gazed from his twenty-franc note to the weather-vane on the tower, from his muddy boots to the gravel drive, and as the spirit of decision was in the habit of coming to him only under favourable circumstances, he sat down on the stone curb-

ing to ponder the injustices of life. His grimy boots confessed the ignominy of his position. But you must not suppose that his grief was wholly unpleasant to him; on the contrary, he savoured it with exquisite appreciation. He even provoked himself to tears by the only means certain of producing them: he sighed over his own lot. "Poor Ivan! Abandoned by everybody!" The summoned tears were already rising to his eyes, and he could feel the abundant and consoling flow ready to come, when the grating of wheels on the main road caused him to look up.

A bay horse was trotting down the road towards him at a smart pace; in its wake rocked a coachmanless brougham. In one leap, Molinoff was at the horse's jaw and brought it to a halt, forelegs stiff and iron shoes scraping.

"Whoa, there!" he ordered, "Who–a–a . . ."

At this point a furious voice interrupted him from the interior of the carriage:

"What the devil are you doing out there?" And the face of a nettled old man appeared over the dashboard.

Molinoff, serene in his knowledge of having

accomplished a duty and saved an elderly gentleman's life, released the horse and approached the brougham with a smile.

"Comte Ivan Molinoff," he said, removing his hat in deference to the other's age.

At this name, the driver's asperity melted. He opened the door and stepped to the ground.

"Marquis de Servanes," he said, extending his hand to Molinoff. And, without referring to what had happened, "You are no doubt on your way to Beauchêne?" he added.

"Beauchêne? Why . . . I didn't . . ."

"We are only a few hundred yards from there now; this is the entrance. Will you do me the honour of sharing my carriage? I suppose you have left yours farther down the road?"

"Mine? Oh, yes, mine is some distance from here. . . ."

He swept one arm vaguely in the direction of Russia.

"I see," said the Marquis, "on the road to Tuffes. You must have stopped at the postern gate."

"The postern gate . . . yes, I left it there. If you will excuse me, I'll go back for it."

"Don't bother to do that. D'Eglantier will send his man."

M. de Servanes took Molinoff by the elbow and ushered him into the brougham. Then, climbing somewhat stiffly into the seat beside him, he picked up the reins once more and slapped them across the horse's back. Molinoff realized at last the mistake that his zeal had hurried him into, and the justice of his new friend's irritation. But his regrets were lost in a sense of well-being that was beginning to suffuse him, and he surrendered himself to the unknown as a dusty traveller sinks into a hot bath. He felt himself cleansed and refreshed by this French nobleman's welcome. Only the thought of the mud on his boots disturbed him, and while M. de Servanes showered him with courtesies, he scrubbed his feet furtively on the carriage blanket.

The bus was in a twitter at the arrival of this young, handsome, and unknown man, whom M. de Servanes introduced:

"The Comte de Molinoff."

Françoise dropped her cards and slipped across the room to her sister.

"It's he," she whispered.

Mme. de La Huppe was swelling and cooing like a plump pigeon.

"I had the pleasure of picking up M. de Molinoff outside the gate," added M. de Servanes. "He had left his carriage down the road."

This carriage that was being attributed to him was becoming a source of embarrassment to Molinoff, but he had no idea how to get rid of it.

M. d'Eglantier offered to send César for it.

"Please don't bother about that," said Molinoff hurriedly. "The horse will find her way back to the stable alone. She really has an extraordinary memory. Just the other day, for example . . ."

And to avoid talking of himself, he talked of his horse. He astonished them with examples of its memory; he drew a vivid portrait of the animal, a chestnut mare which could trot for two hours without beginning to grow winded. It's name was Buria.

"That's a Russian name," he added, "meaning 'Indomitable as the Thunderbolt.' "

"What a beautiful name!" exclaimed Françoise, who had not looked away from him since he had entered the room.

But the first impression of well-being was gradually dissolving and in its place Molinoff felt a growing uneasiness. "How am I going to get out of here?" he wondered.

M. d'Eglantier offered him a chair, and in a moment the other chairs were drawn in a semicircle about his. No one had yet thought to ask for an explanation of his presence at Beauchêne. Such was the charm of his conversation that the guests were waiting now for him to describe Buria's harness and his carriage, as he had described his horse, for the sheer pleasure of listening to him.

But he knew that sooner or later he would have to say something about himself.

The intimacy of this domestic setting, the young girls, the fatherly old gentlemen gathered about him, carried him back to the time of his adolescence: it was the summer vacation, the

samovar was humming, and the conversation was about Ivan's new horse. "I shall call it Buria," he had said. "What a beautiful name!" one of his cousins had exclaimed.

He accepted the illusion as passively as a sleeper accepts his dream.

"I have come as a neighbour," he began.

"A neighbour?" echoed M. d'Eglantier. "Then, in that case, you must be from Fontecreuse?"

"Yes, from Fontecreuse."

"From Fontecreuse!" echoed Anne and Françoise simultaneously.

"From Fontecreuse!" exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe. "But surely you are not Venezuelan?"

"I am Russian, Madame."

"A Russian—one of our allies! How fortunate! And how delightful of you to be both our neighbour and a Russian!"

Mme. de La Huppe's cheeks flamed and she fanned herself vigorously. M. de La Huppe, whose great-grandfather had been guillotined, said something about the Soviets. At this infamous word, Molinoff ground his heel on the floor and, with clenched teeth, uttered a Rus-

sian word, which everyone present translated by the name of an animal. To clear the atmosphere, the Comtesse Le Fort spoke of Borodin, and sang a few measures from *Prince Igor*. The Comte Le Fort asked if Russian women were beautiful.

"Not so beautiful as the French," replied Molinoff, turning to the two ladies with a glance which strayed off towards the young girls. The General had begun to explain the battle of the Masurian Lakes, and asked for dominoes to represent the German and Russian troops.

"I was there," said Molinoff in a low voice, dropping his eyes.

"He was there, General, he was there!" cried Mme. de La Huppe. "Think of it! We have a hero of the Masurian Lakes for a neighbour. And those horrid people said that you were Venezuelan!"

"That was perhaps . . . perhaps M. Cortés they were speaking of, Madame. But he is Bolivian."

"Cortés . . . Cortés? Wait a moment. . . . Yes, that was the name they mentioned. But

what relation is there between you and this man Cortés?"

"Well . . ."

At that moment Molinoff yearned to die. But all these faces waiting expectantly for his next words were charged with such friendliness, such real affection, that he plunged into falsehood.

". . . he's a friend of mine."

If he were to drown, then let it be in imposture. It would be his way of dying.

"How strange!" murmured Mme. de La Huppe.

That anyone from the tropics should have such a friend as the Comte de Molinoff was contrary to all the beliefs cherished in the bus. The members of this little clan, instinctively hostile to all foreigners, were surprised to find themselves so cordially inclined towards a newcomer; but, of course, he belonged to a class in society for which frontiers vanish under the influence of good breeding.

"Didn't your friend go away recently?" asked M. d'Eglantier.

"Yes . . . to be sure, he went . . . he went away recently."

"So you are alone now at Fontecreuse?"

"Yes . . . or rather, not entirely. . . ."

"With your servants, of course. . . ."

Anne poured the tea, apologizing because she could not offer him Russian tea, the grocers in Azay being unfamiliar with any variety but Ceylon.

Françoise had not yet dared speak to Molinoff. Of all those about him, she was the most moved. Never had she seen a young man so close at hand before. Each time her glance met his, she felt her heart melt in pain. Yet she could have no rest until the meeting was repeated, and in the hope of bringing this about, she searched her mind for a question to ask him. All that she knew of Russia she had learned in *General Durakin*. She talked eagerly of *troikas, izbas,* and *vodka*. She explained to the Comte Le Fort that all *muzhiks* were dirty and lazy, and that they had to be whipped before they would work.

"Isn't that true?" she asked, turning to Molinoff.

"Perfectly," he replied.

Then she begged to be told what was meant, exactly, by "Russian salad." But Molinoff suspected her now of alluding maliciously to his career as cook; he blushed and assured her that he had never heard that expression.

Presently Mme. de La Huppe silenced Françoise. M. de La Huppe's reference to the Bolsheviks had bred a tingling anticipation in her blood. She yearned to hear this handsome Slav tell with his own lips of the Cheka and Chinese executioners, of the murder of the Imperial family, or of the dungeons in the fortress of Peter and Paul.

"And you actually took part in those terrible days?" she murmured, raising her eyes to heaven. "How you must have suffered!"

"Deeply," said Molinoff, with the modesty of a martyr.

"Torture? The knout? The rack?"

"No, Madame, not those."

"Boiling oil?"

"Alas, worse than that," said Molinoff, thinking of his kitchen fire.

"Worse? . . ." gasped Mme. de La Huppe. "Tell me about it, tell me ——"

She glanced at the two girls.

"No," she continued, lowering her voice, "come to Plessis-Puçay some Thursday soon; we must talk of these horrors alone."

"Shall we go on with our game of bridge?" suggested the Comte de La Huppe. "M. de Molinoff will perhaps join us and take Françoise's place."

The game at once grew lively; Molinoff played recklessly, bidding and raising in his weakest colour. At times he routed the General by sheer audacity and luck; then he would grow suddenly absent-minded and, with more attention for the glances of the two sisters than for the cards that had been dealt, would blunder like a sheep into the hands of his opponents. Mme. de La Huppe lay in wait for the time when he was the dummy, drew him into a corner, and showered him with questions about the Tsar, Rasputin, and Yusupoff; and congratulated him on saving his own fortune from the national holocaust.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "we who have nothing but our land will be ruined by the next revolution. It will make beggars of us all."

The players were clamouring for Molinoff to come back to his place at the table. Dizzy with delight, apprehension, Mme. de La Huppe's volubility, and the young girls' adorable silence, he picked up his cards. At the end of the game, he owed nineteen francs and a half.

To the consternation of every one, he made his apologies and prepared to leave.

"Just one more hand," insisted the General.

"You mustn't hurry away from us," said M. d'Eglantier, "when it is time for you to leave, I will have the carriage brought around, and César will drop you at your door."

Molinoff protested that the walk would do him good, and that it was only a step to Fontecreuse.

"It will take you at least an hour, walking at a smart pace," M. d'Eglantier pointed out.

"And what about your poor horse?" asked Françoise. "You haven't forgotten it, have you? It may not have found its way back."

"My horse?" echoed Molinoff, who had indeed completely forgotten it.

"How thoughtless of me!" said M. d'Eglantier. "Let me send my man at once to look for it."

The Comtesse Le Fort offered to drop M. de Molinoff at Fontecreuse on the way back to Thouard; the detour, she assured him, would be trifling—a scant mile or two.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," interrupted Mme. de La Huppe. "We will take M. de Molinoff home in the barouche. Fontecreuse is on the road to Plessis-Puçay; that is, within a few miles."

It was becoming a race for the honour of taking this engaging young man home.

"Alas," thought Molinoff, "how good-hearted they all are!"

He rose abruptly and bowed to each of his new friends. M. d'Eglantier walked down the drive with him as far as the gate.

"Good-bye," he said, "and remember that we shall always be glad to see you at Beauchêne. You must prove that you have enjoyed our company by coming back soon."

That evening, dinner was served to Mme. Cortés inexplicably late. And what was worse, Molinoff had cooked the entire meal without a grain of salt.

VI

Anne and Françoise had shared the same bedroom as long as they could remember.

The walls were covered with pale blue paper, dotted with bouquets of forget-me-nots and daisies, interwoven with sprigs of oats. The two beds stood chastely against one wall, parallel to each other under their twin canopies. Françoise was responsible for the orange water that stood each night on the little table between them; Anne blew out the lamp. Once in bed, they exchanged their impressions of the day while waiting for sleep to overtake them. And the amazing thing was that they invariably found material for these conversations for at least ten minutes, sometimes even longer.

That evening they hurried through their toilet, braiding their hair perfunctorily. When the lamp was out, Françoise plunged at once into the traditional exchange of impressions:

"What do you think of him?"

"Not bad," said Anne indifferently.

"But I always thought Russians were blond."

"Isn't he?"

"No, he seemed quite dark to me. But, of course, I didn't look at him carefully. How old do you suppose he is?"

"What difference does it make to you how old he is?"

"None, really. What difference could it make to us? Let's go to sleep. I'm frightfully sleepy."

A moment later, Françoise began again:

"I hope he found his horse, don't you?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"What a strange name it had!"

"Do you remember it?"

"No."

"Neither do I."

Thus they fenced with each other, while both, in the protecting darkness, were reviving their memories of the young stranger: they recalled the quick movement of his eyes, the black hair they had denied noticing, the smile on his lips when he talked of his horse, and even—it must

be admitted—the horse's name. Under her closed lids, Anne was discovering a new delight in watching the little trick he had of nodding his head, and the air of melancholy that came over him whenever he spoke of himself. She recognized this as the modesty of heroes, the easy grace of a cavalier.

Françoise was picturing the flush that had appeared on M. de Molinoff's cheeks at her question about the Russian salad. Eighteen years old, this was the first time in her life that she had made a man blush. The recollection of it burned her own cheek like a kiss and, in the secrecy of the night, she prolonged the sensation. But Anne's silence soon made her talkative:

"When papa returns his call," she began, "we might go with him."

"Both of us? . . . We should look ridiculous."

"Well, one of us, then. . . . You, Anne."

"I have no particular desire to go, but if papa insists . . ."

"Try to find out if he plays tennis, if he liked us, if he is going to come back next Tuesday, if . . ."

"Please, Françoise, let me go to sleep."

"Let me dream," she meant. In the yard, the farm dogs were barking; Anne could hear a strange bark replying from somewhere in the distance, perhaps at Fontecreuse. . . . The two sisters settled down for sleep.

Two hours later, they were still awake.

"Are you asleep, Anne?" whispered Françoise.

"No."

"I'd like a drink of orange water."

Anne lit the lamp and they sat up in bed, propped against the pillows.

"How silly of us!" exclaimed Françoise, with a laugh. "Why can't we get to sleep?"

"The dogs kept me awake," said Anne.

"I think it was the heat that kept me from sleeping," said Françoise, whose cheeks were on fire. "It's stifling in this room."

"Isn't it?" said Anne. "Open the window a little more."

Françoise slipped from her bed, pushed the window wide open, and in her trailing white gown leaned out over the slumbering park. Suddenly she rested her elbows on the rail, leaned

out as far as she could, and looked intently from one side to the other.

"What are you looking at?" asked Anne.

"Nothing. . . . I thought I heard somebody walking."

"Somebody walking? . . ."

Anne flung back her covers, hurried across the room and leaned out beside her sister, holding her breath to listen. But only the howling of the dogs came up to them and, from the forest, the yelping of a fox.

"We must be crazy. . . ."

"It's the heat. . . ."

They drank a glass of sweetened orange water, crept back between the sheets, and presently fell asleep over the caressing thought, fluttering in each of their heads: "Perhaps it was he. . . ."

But it was not.

At that moment Molinoff, whose wealth had now shrunk to a half of one franc, was considering how he might become the owner of a horse and carriage. His blankets lay in a heap on the kitchen floor; a handful of cigarette butts

were slowly burning holes in the sheets. But Molinoff paced the room, weighing his half franc piece on the palm of one hand, and measuring the extent of his misery.

After two hours and twenty cigarettes of meditation, the carriage was not yet found. But Molinoff was one of those men that see most clearly through a haze of smoke. When the atmosphere of the kitchen had thickened until it was completely opaque, he discovered that his situation, bad as it was, had certain bright spots: men of his own class in life now gave him, not orders, but their hands to shake; and their daughters served tea and cakes for him, who for so many years had served others.

In the curling smoke of his cigarette, the two sisters began to take form. A wavering form at first, in which they melted into each other, and dissolved before his eyes. But presently, as girls in a game of blind man's buff drop a scarf or a ribbon in their pursuers' hands, the figures of his imagination began to reward him, one with a grave smile, the other with a blush. His heart received them without trying to choose between

them; he was content to watch their gestures and their shimmering dresses. Secretly he thought of them as little sisters that he might have had, and all he asked was to be allowed to laugh and talk with them. Their separate charms were woven into one, like flowers in a single bouquet, and acted on his unhappiness like the sight of palms in the desert on a traveller's weariness. In their shadow he would find rest and forgetfulness, which was all that his heart craved.

He forgot the mishaps of his adventurous journey, the collapse of his pocketbook, and the ignominy of his position.

He decided to begin life.

He carried his mattress into M. Cortés' smoking-room, piled it high with Oriental rugs and cushions, stretched himself out on this luxurious divan and, lighting one of his master's cigars, smiled reflectively.

A quarter of an hour later, he tiptoed to the floor above and made a survey of the Bolivian's wardrobe. There he discovered a generous assortment of silk shirts and pyjamas, and found by

experiment that, except for a slight wrinkle on the shoulder, his employer's suits fitted him to perfection. He made a careful selection of cravats, handkerchiefs, and socks. The shoes were a trifle large for him, but he could remedy that by fitting cardboard soles in them. For, as his booty increased, his plan was growing more definite.

Descending once more to the smoking-room, he abandoned himself to the satisfaction of watching a new Molinoff pass and repass before the mirror, enveloped in a silk dressing-gown embroidered in gold. Gathering the precious material about him, and twirling the cord with one hand, he retrieved that gallant, easy carriage that, during so many years of servitude, he had been forbidden to display. Over the Oriental rugs that he had spread out, he now tossed bear-skins and panther-skins. And, rolling himself in the warm fur, he stifled cries like those of a prisoner unexpectedly granted his liberty. . . .

Presently he hurried into the kitchen and took down his ikons, the photographs he had hung on the walls; he placed Princess Paley, between Denikin in an astrakhan bonnet and the Tsare-

vich in a cadet's uniform, on the smoking-room table, which he thus converted into his dressing table.

Over the head of the divan, pinned to the imitation ebony of the wall by a faded ribbon, he hung a dainty miniature, enclosed in a circle of pearls: it was his great-grandmother, her face framed in long curls and smiling with the gentle expression of 1830—the only member of his family still left him, the only jewel, in fact, that he had not sold.

In the morning, Mme. Cortés scolded at being awakened before noon by an epidemic of noises throughout the house. She sent Sister Encarnación to investigate the cause of the disturbances.

"It is nothing at all," said Molinoff. "We are merely house-cleaning."

The truth was, he had embarked upon an ambitious undertaking.

Fontecreuse glittered with the signs of newly acquired wealth; everything about the house suggested a bull market in coffee. Molinoff was taking this in hand. Paolo and his wife had been drafted into service, each having been assigned

his task. Paolo's mission was to strip the façade, with a cold chisel, of its horns of plenty, and to cover the gilding on the balconies with a rusty iron paint. Mme. Paolo was appointed to deal with the drawing-room. Molinoff scoured the attics and servants' quarters, unearthing a tea-table in one, a whatnot in another, and an arm-chair somewhere else. He came down the stairs with cries of joy, laden with bric-à-brac and followed by Pia bearing an eighteenth-century lacquered casket. Eventually the drawing-room was perfect: the hangings were faded; mites had nibbled at the shepherds' cheeks. Each piece of furniture bore its wounds, or displayed the infirmities of age: the black horsehair of the sofa had worn thin, the chest of drawers was scaling. These were the things that had shocked M. Cortés and his interior decorator; and they shocked Mme. Paolo now. But Molinoff was enchanted, and mentally he put the Bolivian down as a boor. In restoring the screen to its place before the hearth, and the console between the windows, he was repairing an injustice and assuring the return of the émigrés.

Mme. Cortés had to content herself with a cold lunch and a pastryless dinner.

That night Molinoff spent in drinking champagne in the cellar. As he emptied each glass, he shattered it on the flagged pavement. He laughed and wept at once; had he possessed a weapon, he would no doubt have slain himself in his enthusiasm.

VII

Signs of the new regime also appeared in the kitchen.

The day after Molinoff's house-cleaning, luncheon was a failure. The vegetables lay wilted on the platter, the butter tasted rancid, and the baked pike gave off a suspiciously strong flavour. Mme. Cortés sent for her cook.

"Ah, Madame!" he exclaimed, kissing her pudgy hand, "I should rather have died than let this happen through any fault of mine. The fish is not fresh? True, but that is because the town is so far away and the train is slow. At the fish-market, they send us what they want to get rid of. Now, if I had a carriage and a good swift horse . . ."

The reins in his hands, the horse at a smart trot, Molinoff was returning from Azay, bringing honey fresh from the hive, butter from the

churn, figs still warm from the sun that had ripened them, egg-plants . . .

"Egg-plants?" interrupted Mme. Cortés, "what is that?"

Ah, what was an egg-plant? He rolled back his sleeves, sliced the plump purple globe in half, stuffed it with mushrooms and chopped meat, and served it steaming in olive oil.

"That's enough," said Mme. Cortés. "You may buy the carriage."

"At once, Madame," said Molinoff.

A few days later he was to be met spanking along the roads in a handsome tilbury behind a chestnut mare.

In this outfit he drove into town to buy his supplies. His soft voice and gracious manners completely won over the women in the shops at Azay. They made mistakes in their count, and the beam of their scales followed the inclination of their hearts. Waiting on him, they admired his hands but never thought to wonder how he came to be there. It was enough for them that he had the bearing of a lord and did not haggle over

prices. Aside from that, he was M. Molinoff, he lived at Fontecreuse with a lady, who never went out, and a nun, whom he drove to mass on Sunday in his carriage.

One morning, as he was coming out of the butcher-shop, a leg of lamb and a jar of mince-meat in his arms, he met Françoise d'Eglantier, whose arms were filled with flowers.

"Good morning!" she cried. "Every Saturday, when we come to market, we meet the dear old General. Just look at the flowers he gave me!"

Molinoff tossed the lamb and the mince-meat into his carriage, admired the roses that overflowed her arms and, lifting up one that was slipping from the bouquet, remarked that its hue was as delicate as a girl's cheek.

"Really?" she asked in a tone as limpid as the colour of the flower itself.

She had never before heard a girl compared with a flower; in other words, no young man had ever mentioned her complexion to her.

"I think your horse is a darling," she said. "Is that Buria? Oh, I am so glad you found her again."

She stroked the horse's neck and shoulder with the familiarity of an old affection. "Good Buria," she murmured, "you *are* beautiful . . . and you have eyes like a deer's. . . . But you would rather be free, wouldn't you, and run in the forest? . . ."

Although her words were addressed to the horse, her eyes remained on Molinoff, brimming with unconcealed pleasure at having met him, and gazing into his with the frank insistence of a little girl that wants to be played with.

"Shall I introduce you to Belgian Hare and Dragon II?" she asked. "They are our horses. They're at the Master of the Hounds Inn, where we unharnessed."

Welcoming an escape from the neighbourhood of the grocer and the butcher, Molinoff assured her that he was yearning to meet Belgian Hare and Dragon II and, leading his horse by the bridle, he accompanied Françoise towards the inn.

"I'm so happy to have met you this morning," she told him. "Do you play tennis?"

"Occasionally," said Molinoff evasively.

"You do? How lovely! And you ride horse-

back? Then, you must go hunting with us this autumn."

Her face radiated joy as she turned towards Molinoff; the Rue Gambetta was not wide enough to hold her happiness.

"This is Belgian Hare," she said, when they had reached the stables of the Master of the Hounds. "He is my saddle-horse. Don't you love him?"

Molinoff declared that Belgian Hare was perfect. He ran his hand from the animal's withers to the shoulder, then down to the knee and pastern, with little whistles of admiration.

"You really like him, don't you? And you think he is beautiful? Oh, I am so happy," repeated Françoise, "I am so happy!"

From that moment, in fact, everything made her happy. Her eyes followed Molinoff's gestures, stealing them from the horse, and transferring them to her own throat and shoulder. She opened her heart to his male voice, and her life to this unhoped for young man who talked of girls as if they were flowers. In the warm darkness of the stable, she could hear the heavy breathing

of the horses and the creaking of tethers in the iron rings along the mangers. Pigeons were cooing on the roof. Molinoff, twining the fingers of one hand in Belgian Hare's mane, the other on his hip, had begun to talk. The discretion of their retreat, this sudden intimacy with a friendly and laughing girl, had put him in a mood to talk of himself.

He launched into a tale of horseback riding in Russia, filled with mad gallops, reckless jumps, and incredible obstacles. With rising excitement, he covered a hundred versts without stepping from the saddle, pausing neither for rivers nor mountains. Silent with wonder, Françoise followed him at the same pace, swallowing the dust of the Russian plains, and plunged beside him into the Dnieper, which at that point was five hundred yards wide. . . . But, just as Belgian Hare was groping for the bank on the opposite side, the ring of a footstep in the courtyard unhorsed her.

It was Anne bringing her bundles to the carriage.

Molinoff hastened forward, opened the door

of the break, and stowed the packages under the seat.

"We were talking about horses," he said.

Françoise explained that M. de Molinoff was a marvellous horseman, that he could gallop without stopping for a hundred . . .

"What do you call them?" she asked, turning towards him.

"Versts."

". . . a hundred versts. And, you know, a verst is a tremendous distance."

Anne looked closely into her sister's face.

"Run back to the grocer's," she said. "I forgot the biscuits."

Molinoff passed happily from one to the other. With Anne, who was more grave and more reserved, his tone changed; not that he tried deliberately to charm them; it was merely that his spirit found rest in forgetting his own thoughts and feelings, to think and feel like these two young Frenchwomen.

He talked now of the château at Azay and the beauties of France. He recited what he had learned about Touraine and the Valois, when he

had been a student in the Corps of Pages. It was not much, but Anne was delighted.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you too love our kings and our history. I am so happy!"

Molinoff confessed to an innate love of elegance, of the body as well as of the mind, and declared that no other people had had kings like François I, Henry IV, Louis XV, Charles X ——"

"And Monseigneur le Duc de Guyenne," finished Anne.

"The Duc de Guyenne?"

"Yes, the Pretender. He is our future King."

Molinoff assured her of his joy at hearing that France was soon to have a king.

"No one can deny," he said, "that France should have a court, with all of its ceremonies and festivals and costumes."

He said this because the clothes he had chosen that morning, in M. Cortés' wardrobe, were highly becoming to him, because the sun was flooding a cloudless sky with light, and because Mlle. d'Eglantier seemed pleased to have him say it.

But the appearance of the cook, in his white cap and apron, on the kitchen doorstep of the inn, robbed Molinoff of his newly acquired ease. With a sense of guilt he realized that the cook was beaming at Anne and that Anne was saying, "Good Morning, Florent."

"Florent is my nurse's eldest son," she added to Molinoff.

"A fine-looking fellow," said Molinoff, feeling his throat turn dry.

"Isn't he? And just imagine, mama had him educated to be a priest."

". . . to be a priest? Well, well. . . ."

"But he gave up the priesthood for this menial work as cook."

". . . menial, yes. . . ."

"Wasn't that a terrible come-down?"

"Oh, in some cases . . ."

"I'll introduce him to you. It will be fun."

"I am sorry," said Molinoff, who felt the courtyard of the Master of the Hounds, with its carriages, pigeons, and kings of France, beginning to revolve about him, "but I am in a bit of a hurry this morning. . . ."

Anne had already beckoned to the cook.

"Are you still having a good time with the frying-pans and all the horrid, greasy smells, Florent?"

"It's the only life for me, Mademoiselle."

She gave Molinoff a glance of complicity.

"M. de Molinoff was just saying," she went on, "that he could not understand how such a strapping man as you could spend his life over a stove."

At this speech, Molinoff leaned against the wheel of the break for support. His cheeks had turned pale, and his lips trembled. Anne noticed his disturbance.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "What is the matter?"

A smile flickered on his pallid features, and with one hand he made a gesture of a man about to drown.

"Quick, Florent!" said Anne. "Monsieur is ill."

Florent ran for vinegar and a napkin; Anne rubbed his temples vigorously.

"It's nothing at all," said Molinoff, opening his eyes.

"Perhaps the smell from the kitchen . . . ?"

Alas, one should never awaken a sleep-walker without warning when he is treading the meadows of the stars.

"You frightened me," said Anne. "I am going to send papa to Fontecreuse this afternoon to see if you are better."

Molinoff begged her not to think of it. He was feeling quite well; in fact, he had never felt better in his life. . . . And, while she was returning the vinegar and napkin to Florent, he pinched his cheeks and bit his lips to bring back the colour.

But Anne insisted; she would come with her father herself.

"You must be lonely at Fontecreuse. And I suppose none of your servants even has the address of a doctor?"

"I am sure they have," he said, dreading her charitable zeal.

But in the end he yielded to it, and agreed to the proposed visit. All his boldness he reserved for day-dreams; in his real life, he always surrendered after a brief struggle, finding peace in defeat, which became the source of a new dream.

Whatever one may say, fatalism is sometimes creative.

He climbed into the tilbury.

"Take care of the sun," called Anne.

But he was already spinning over clouds.

VIII

On reaching Fontecreuse, he devoted himself to the preparation of a batch of cakes, which were not all intended for Mme. Cortés' lunch.

He reared architectural structures of biscuits in symbolical forms, to which he alone held the key. He laid out a lake of quince jelly, and launched crafts whose sails were rose petals of pink sugar; in the centre stood an island, strewn with more roses, and planted with angelica sticks making the initials A and F. He arranged roses, singly and in clusters, throughout the château, picking the thorns off each stem. He scattered armfuls of China rose petals on the terrace steps. Thus were the d'Eglantiers to be honoured.

Pia gazed with round eyes. These preliminaries reminded her of religious processions and flowered chapels in her native land.

"Is Madame expecting the Madonna?" she asked.

"Madame is expecting the visit of a noble lord and his daughters. Put on a clean apron, Pia, and watch for the carriage."

He set the tea-table in the drawing-room, gave an air of casual disorder to the arrangement of the chairs, and took down the photograph of the President of the Republic of Bolivia, which had been forgotten on the mantelpiece. Then he tip-toed upstairs to assure himself that Mme. Cortés was resting quietly, pinned a rose in his button-hole, and awaited the promised visit.

Towards four o'clock the crunch of an automobile on the gravel of the drive set his heart pounding. He lit a cigarette and plunged into an arm-chair in the salon.

Pia burst into the room breathlessly.

"It's the nobleman," she said. "Shall I tell Madame?"

"Run out and hold the carriage door for him; then go back to your kitchen."

He strolled into the hall, one hand in his jacket pocket, the other holding a cigarette at the level of his lips. He felt thoroughly at home.

But the burble of Pia's voice in conversation,

and the name of M. Cortés, reached his ears. Hurriedly flinging open the door to the terrace, he perceived an ecclesiastic, evidently of high rank, leaning from the window of a limousine.

"Ah!" exclaimed Pia with relief, "here is Monsieur Molinoff, who can tell your Lordship where Monsieur is."

The violet robe, and the gold tassel of the priest's hat, had intimidated the little Italian, who crossed herself as she fled.

Molinoff advanced to meet his visitor.

At the same moment a cart, drawn by a plump little pony, described a graceful semicircle about the courtyard and drew up behind the episcopal motor.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe, stepping to the ground, "will you send a man to hold my horse? I was passing, and dropped in. How are you? You have guests? . . . Oh, a bishop!"

Monseigneur Pinto Silvares da Costa, emerging from his limousine, offered Molinoff his ring to kiss. Mme. de La Huppe knelt on the gravel and received the prelate's blessing.

"I expected to find my friend, M. Cortés, here," said the Bishop. "You are one of his people, are you not?"

Confused by the question, and wondering what title he should give to this Catholic dignitary, Molinoff hesitated. But Mme. de La Huppe, dusting the gravel from her knees, performed the introductions with eager zeal:

"The Comte de Molinoff, the most delightful of our neighbours. And myself, Monseigneur, your humble daughter, Comtesse Armand de La Huppe."

The Bishop considered these unexpected hosts with evident satisfaction, and introduced himself in turn.

"I stopped to greet my good friend, Don Diego Cortés," he said, "but I am happy to find in this dwelling, on which I have recently bestowed my benediction, such a gracious countess and noble count."

"Will you come in, Monseigneur?" said Mme. de La Huppe, leading the Bishop towards the terrace.

It was she who did the honours; like Molinoff,

she was thoroughly at home. But her voice carried far, and he trembled lest its echoes should reach Mme. Cortés' ears.

"Dear Fontecreuse!" she exclaimed. "Ah, Monsieur, it is many years since I have entered this house. I am deeply moved."

With these last words, she gave Molinoff an ardent glance. Her cheeks glowed like ripe cherries, denying the air of sudden languor that she assumed. Her eyes, her lips, her voice, all betrayed the overflow of life, bursting from the narrow prison of her stays.

". . . deeply moved," she sighed, as she entered the drawing-room.

She established the Bishop in an arm-chair, chatted about herself, the d'Eglantiers, the Le Forts, Monsieur de Servanes, and General de La Pommelière. "The oldest families of the neighbourhood," she added. Monseigneur listened with surprise, searching his memory for some peg to hang them on.

"Then, no doubt," he suggested, "you are acquainted with the Peña y Solars, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and that original person, Ben Daoud?"

"I don't know them," said Mme. de La Huppe, in a chilly tone.

And, turning towards Molinoff:

"Have you ever heard these names before?"

Molinoff made a vague gesture. He was distracted: expecting two young ladies, he had received a bishop and a duenna. Already, Mme. de La Huppe was making inroads on the platter of cakes, destroying their amorous architecture with an absent-minded hand. She helped herself generously, for she adored sweets.

"These biscuits are delicious," she said. "Your cook is an artist in pastry."

But, for the moment, it was the prelate who occupied her thoughts.

"Monseigneur," she said, "I am grateful to Providence for bringing us together. I am sure that you are loyal to Maurras . . ."

"Maurras?" echoed the Bishop of Mossamedes.

". . . yes, the leader of our Royalist party—and against the Vatican. Another tart, Monseigneur?"

Monseigneur smiled indulgently. The disputes of men did not penetrate to his apartment in

the Rue de la Pompe, in Paris, nor his summer home on the banks of the Loire.

"Madame," he said, "I do not know who M. Maurras is, whom you seem to prefer to our Holy Father, but surely he must have some temporal attraction, which is stronger in your eyes than the spiritual grace of the Supreme Pontiff."

Molinoff was pacing the room nervously, leaving the Portuguese Bishop and Mme. de La Huppe to their discussion, of which he understood nothing. From time to time he paused, pressed his face against the window-pane, and watched for the arrival of his friends.

"What? You are for the Pope, Monseigneur," exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe, "you, a Catholic Bishop! I see that I shall have to convert you."

Monseigneur explained with a smile that he was little fitted by nature to create a new schism; and that meanwhile he loved peace, with the loss of which one stands to lose everything: wealth, friendship, and leisure.

"Thus, my dear Comtesse," he continued,

"you find me today engaged in an apostolic mission in your woods and valleys."

He explained that it was a source of surprise and regret to him to see the old aristocracy of France remain secluded on its estates, unacquainted with the foreign aristocracy that had come to Touraine, and often hostile towards it.

He invited Mme. de La Huppe to visit him in his hermitage on the banks of the Loire, where he would be happy to introduce several charming American ladies to her.

"And I trust the Comte de Molinoff will come with you," he added.

He did not dare say, "As well as the Comte de La Huppe," for his hostess's behaviour had led him to believe that her relations with the young Russian were more than friendly.

He rose; neither Mme. de La Huppe nor Molinoff urged him to stay. Molinoff escorted him to his motor, and returned at once to Mme. de La Huppe.

"I will certainly go to see him," she exclaimed. "We will both go to see him. This Bishop—he is charming, by the way, and violet is very becom-

ing to him—must be made to see that our cause is just, that we have been betrayed by that henchman of the Pope, Cardinal Gasparri, and that we are ready to meet martyrdom, if Maurras demands it. Ring for tea, my friend, I am perishing of thirst. What delicious cakes!"

But Molinoff prudently did not ring; instead, he connected an electric tea-kettle with a socket in the wall.

"Come and sit beside me," said Mme. de La Huppe, settling herself on the sofa, "I want you to tell me about yourself, your past, and . . ."

"Just a moment," he said. "I hear a carriage."

He hurried to the window, his heart faltering.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Your horse is running away!"

And, indeed, Mme. de La Huppe's pony no longer having Monseigneur's limousine in front of its nose, had yielded to its natural inclinations, and was trotting briskly across the lawn. Molinoff vaulted down the terrace and overtook the pony as it was broaching a bed of roses. Mme. de La Huppe followed in his wake.

"Bravo!" she cried, "what a marvellous runner you are! You have the stride of a thoroughbred. You . . . I . . ."

Breathless, she lifted one hand to her breast. Words choked her, refusing to leave her throat; but her eyes expressed what her lips could not say. It was perfectly clear. Yet Molinoff remained both deaf and blind. He was wondering how he could get this intruding female into her carriage; he began speaking in the past tense: "I have been charmed by your visit. . . . It has been all too short. . . ." But she remained in the present.

"Shall we go inside again?" she suggested. "We can leave the horse with your stableman."

Molinoff preferred to tie the pony to a tree.

They returned to the drawing-room, and the conversation on the sofa began again. Molinoff was torn between a desire to die on the spot and a craving to strangle his importunate guest. Between these two extremities, his will fluttered in a neutral zone. Mme. de La Huppe chattered and asked questions; but as she supplied both the questions and the replies, she soon knew Mol-

inoff's life without his having opened his mouth. She held his hand, seeming to read what she wanted to know in his palm.

". . . You are a great horseman," she told him, "a born sportsman . . . but I see that you love beauty, elegance, and . . . ladies. . . ."

At these words, Molinoff, whose ear was still tuned to sounds from without, leaped to his feet.

"Here they are!" he exclaimed.

It was M. d'Eglantier and his daughters.

Anne and Françoise paused in the hall to examine the walls and ceiling.

"We are looking for the Fontecreuse that we knew as children," explained Françoise. "It is a game we are playing, to see which will be the first to find familiar landmarks."

M. d'Eglantier inquired after his neighbour's health.

"I was troubled about you, after my daughter's report this morning. We came to see how you were."

Molinoff protested that his health was splendid. The pleasure of receiving people of his own

world, young ladies who might have been his own cousins, had brought a flush to his cheeks and revived his spirits.

"I have found it!" cried Françoise, as she entered the drawing-room.

"What?"

"The Fontecreuse we used to know."

She pointed laughingly at Madame de La Huppe.

"Good afternoon, aunty. So you have found your favourite corner again, on the sofa? Nothing has been changed."

"Good afternoon, my children," said Mme. de La Huppe in a vexed tone.

Molinoff pirouetted in the centre of the room. He settled M. d'Eglantier in the softest armchair, and tried to match the other chairs, which he pushed forward for the daughters, with the colours of their dresses. Then he offered cigarettes, which the sisters refused with an exchange of amused glances.

"These are Inchallahs. Perhaps you like Hollywoods better?" he said, opening another box.

The unexpectedness of this offer, and the

bright blue and gold of the box, enchanted Françoise. That the Comte de Molinoff should assume she smoked gave her a flattering picture of herself.

She no longer looked about the room for Mme. de Maulny's work-table, or the cushion that her King Charles spaniel used to doze on; but for such exciting innovations as blue and gold boxes of cigarettes. And, like revelations of a magic world, she discovered the gramophone and its records, the radiators, the electric tea-kettle.

While his daughter was surrendering her imagination to these unknown objects, and her heart to an unknown Russian, M. d'Eglantier was discussing the history of Fontecreuse with Molinoff:

"At the time when Jean de Garguesalle married Jeanne La Roncière, of Fontecreuse . . ."

But Françoise insisted that their host should play the gramophone.

"Are you quite sure you want to hear it?" asked Molinoff, fearing that the music, added to the echoes of Mme. de La Huppe's voice, would certainly attract Mme. Cortés' attention.

"Yes. Please! We have never heard one. Play something gay, amusing, anything. . . . Something very new."

Molinoff chose the most languorous of blues, closed the doors of the cabinet, and leaned against them.

". . . Meanwhile," continued M. d'Eglantier, raising his voice, "Pierre, Lord of Usse . . ."

"Papa, do be quiet," said Anne.

M. d'Eglantier realized then that an invisible orchestra was offering him a concert. The measures of the blues lengthened, dropped, were looped up again, and cut short, like cruller dough in expert hands. The lament of the saxophone and the deep murmur of the trombone filled Françoise with a yearning to climb on the chairs and swing from the chandelier.

"Marvellous!" she cried, when the piece was finished. "Play another!"

Mme. de La Huppe, growing more and more annoyed, rose from her sofa:

"My dear friend," she said to M. d'Eglantier, "I cannot understand why these children should come here and disturb M. de Molinoff in this

fashion. Surely he has other things to do besides cranking a music-box. Good afternoon."

And, addressing Molinoff:

"Will you put me in my carriage?"

He could not do otherwise than follow her; she sighed and leaned against his arm. She led him for a stroll about the pool, leaned over the marble edge to dip her fingers in the water, lost her balance and, with little cries of fright, had to be caught around the waist. She begged for bread, to feed M. Cortés' goldfish. It was a miracle that Sister Encarnación was not at her window, but the lives of the martyrs are filled with such miracles; Molinoff's already counted several. They returned through the rose garden, where Mme. de La Huppe wished to receive a rose from Molinoff's hands. He chose the thorniest.

"Ah, you have chosen the one with the sweetest scent! . . . Thank you. . . ."

At last, she clambered into her cart.

"I hope I shall see you soon," she said.

Coming back into the house, Molinoff found Françoise in the lift. She was riding up and down

in it, uttering a cry of delight each time it dropped.

"How exciting!" she exclaimed. "It feels as if your heart stayed up above, and you suddenly lost your body. It's just like becoming an angel."

She followed Molinoff into the drawing-room. He was walking on air; delivered of his unwelcome guest, he plunged into the illusion of the moment.

"Will you have a whisky?" he asked M. d'Eglantier. "No? . . ."

"I'll have a . . . what did you call it?" said Françoise.

No member of her family had ever heard that word before. But in Françoise's eyes, anything that this elegant young man liked was obviously good. Molinoff brought whisky, a bottle of soda, and glasses, from the library. She learned to pronounce "whisky and soda." Then she tasted it, screwed up her face, and announced that she had never drunk anything to compare with it. Anne did not have the courage to follow her example; and from that moment Françoise took the lead. It was she who served tea, sliced the lemon, and

gave her father permission to finish his story about Pierre, the Lord of Usse. The cakes aroused much admiration, especially the jelly lake, with its island of angelica.

"They look like letters of the alphabet," said Françoise, pecking at the A's and F's that blossomed on the island.

Molinoff was beginning to believe in happiness. The tea had a fine mahogany tint, which the lemon turned golden; the cakes were disappearing between the greedy teeth of the two sisters. M. d'Eglantier was treating him as a friend; that is to say, he did not spare his criticisms on the changes that had been made at Fontecreuse. Molinoff was in ecstasy. As a sign of joy, he emptied his glass and flung it against the marble mantelpiece. The d'Eglantiers gazed at him in amazement, but the grace with which he had accomplished this act led them to suppose that it must be a rite of Russian hospitality, like the offering of bread and salt. Without pausing, he swallowed two more glassfuls; his charm became irresistible, with a tinge of melancholy in his expression and a note of sadness in his voice, which

Anne found so beautiful that she felt she could never tire of listening to it.

"Papa is very glad," she said, "to hear that you are a monarchist."

Of course he was a monarchist. He recognized but two masters: God and the Emperor, the only ones a man of honour might serve.

"Yes," said Anne, "That is what we think too! The King and God."

"He who serves any other master is a coward," continued Molinoff, warming up to his subject, "a muzhik, a slave, fit only for the lash. . . ."

"Goodness! You talk like a true Royalist."

Anne was right: You would have thought he was speaking of the politicians that govern the Republic.

"Monsieur de Molinoff," interrupted Françoise, "I think somebody is calling you."

A shrill voice reached them from the hall. Molinoff left the room precipitately: it was Sister Encarnación: "What is all this rumpus? Madame's siesta has been interrupted, and her digestion troubled; she says that you are to carry on your conversations henceforth in the kitchen."

". . . is a coward," resumed Molinoff, coming back into the drawing-room.

But the interruption had sobered him: the fumes of whisky and the taste of happiness had been driven simultaneously from his head.

"True," said M. d'Eglantier, "It was to avoid serving other masters that one of my ancestors died in '93."

". . . died," echoed Molinoff, passing his hand across his brow.

Françoise burst into a laugh.

"Let's talk of more cheerful things," she said.

But M. d'Eglantier rose and reminded his daughters that it was time to go home. Françoise cast a final glance about this enchanted room, and then at M. de Molinoff himself, elegant and gracious.

She had learned that afternoon that there were two sorts of men: those, like her father and General de La Pommelière, who wore dark suits and white shirts with round cuffs, who smoked their pipes, studied French history and botany, and whose lives were as regular as an almanac; and others who led an extraordinary existence in

dazzling clothes with silk shirts, smoking gilded cigarettes and drinking a fiery liquor to the accompaniment of music that gave one wings. Towards these latter—that is to say, towards M. de Molinoff—she felt herself instinctively drawn. "It is really astonishing," she thought, "that we should have the same tastes: the gramophone, horses, whisky. . . ."

She left this drawing-room, where magic revelations had been granted her, with the certainty that she would return, and would taste there a happiness for which she had, as yet, no name.

The sun was setting as they came out on the terrace; a breeze stirred in the trees of the park.

"Autumn is here," said M. d'Eglantier, "the wind is stripping the roses; the terrace steps are strewn with their petals."

And, with the ferrule of his stick, he cleared the steps so that his daughters should not slip and fall.

IX

A peremptory card from Mme. de La Huppe summoned Molinoff to tea on the following Thursday.

When the day came, he served Mme. Cortés her lunch an hour earlier than usual, substituted an omelet for the roast, and omitted the salad altogether.

Little Pia was busy peeling onions in the kitchen. Her hands trembled as she worked, and the tears that rolled down her cheeks were not caused exclusively by the emanations of the onions.

"Signor Molinoff," she said, smearing a grimy hand across her face, "You are angry at me."

"Nonsense, Pia, nonsense."

"But you are, Signor Molinoff, I know you are. Not a glance, not a word for me in five days —such a look of anger on your face—and all those glasses you have broken in the library—

and that terrible voice you have when I ask for orders: you just growl at me."

"Never mind that! Beat those eggs for the omelet."

"You see! . . ."

"That'll do, I tell you."

The sobs redoubled. But Molinoff paid no attention to them; the groanings of this muzhik's daughter were not his business. He was living his life on a plane above the contingencies of the Paolo family.

When he arrived at Plessis-Puçay, the drawing-room was already thronged with guests.

The Comte de La Huppe had just been elevated to the post of Secretary of the Action Française for the Azay district, and the entire neighbourhood had come to congratulate him. And on top of that, Madame la Duchesse de Guyenne, the wife of the Pretender to the throne of France, had announced that she would receive the homage of her faithful subjects, the following week, at Chinon. Every one was eager for details.

Molinoff wormed his way across the room towards Mme. de La Huppe.

"My dear friend!" she exclaimed, "I am *so* glad you could come!"

She introduced him to the group about her: "Our friend, our ally, the Comte de Molinoff, a great admirer of Maurras."

At once he was surrounded and pressed for his opinion on a dozen subjects at once. Was he not indignant at Gasparri's latest move against France? Did he not think that Cardinal Andrieux showed signs of mental decay? Had he read . . . ? But the President of the Royalist Maids of Montsoreau led him off to a secluded window-seat. This lady was a spinster of about sixty, who concealed the soul of a great statesman in her fragile body. She had never been outside the little valley where she had been born, but she knew the secrets of all the chancelleries of Europe. Not a plot was hatched against France by Papal Nuncios throughout the world that she did not have wind of. If one mentioned the Nuncio at Berlin, she would announce firmly: "Pacelli uses his authority to protect the Alsatian

Heimatbund." Or if it were the Secretary of State of the Vatican: "Gasparri's policy will land us in war within three years." Such pronouncements, together with the masculine cut of her jaw, set off by a straggling moustache, had given her an undisputed influence at the meetings of the Action Française.

"What branch of the Action Française do you belong to?" she asked Molinoff.

"Er . . ."

"You don't mean to say you are not a member yet?"

She drew a little pad and pencil from a pocket in her skirt.

"Your name, please . . . with two f's? . . . Occupation? Landowner, of course. . . ."

Since his escape from a Bolshevist jail, Molinoff had been wary of all conspiracies. Hence he confined himself now to prudent replies, for the truth was he had no very clear idea as to what was expected of him.

"I will see you again in a moment," she said, slipping away in the crowd.

Molinoff was hardly aware that she had left

him: the fashionable tone and archaic manners of the world he was now moving in enchanted him. From time to time the Comtesse de La Huppe caught his eye with a glance of tender interest.

M. de La Huppe, swollen with the favour that had been shown him, and entrusted with the task of presenting the members of the Azay group to Her Royal Highness, passed from one to another, scribbling genealogical notes on scraps of paper, which he had cut to fit the palm of his hand and which he planned to consult during the ceremonies. His notes were highly complicated, as each of his guests, anxious to prove himself a cousin of a relative of a cousin of the House of France, had put him through a set of genealogical gymnastics, for which the natural indolence of his brain had given him no training.

The most anxious of all was the Comte Le Fort. Although a grandson of Lefort, the merchant, he had little to say of his grandfather, but much of his early ancestors. He strode about the room, folding and unfolding a sheet of stiff parchment, covered with a handsome genealogical tree, which

bristled with noble branches and royal off-shoots; at the root, in illuminated letters, appeared: ROBERT LE FORT, *Comte d'Anjou,* 823–866; and on the latest twig: *Robert-Hugues-Adhémar,* COMTE LE FORT, 1878 —

"Of course, La Huppe," the Count was saying, "I take it for granted that you will present me at the head of the delegation."

His one desire was to address Madame la Duchesse de Guyenne as "my dear cousin."

"Of course," replied M. de La Huppe, making the same promise, in response to the same demand, to every one.

In an alcove off the drawing-room, the dowager Marquise de Servanes was teaching the younger ladies the court bow. Françoise d'Eglantier was laughing gaily.

"How am I going to take hold of my dress the way you tell me to? There is no pleat."

But the old lady, whose mother had played with Louis-Philippe's daughters, did not admit that one could be flippant on subjects of etiquette.

"Begin again, Françoise. One step forward, the right foot in the rear. . . ."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Françoise, "I'll never learn that."

She skipped out of the room and, catching sight of Molinoff, ran towards him.

"Would you believe it?" she said. "Aunty Servanes wants me to let down my dress for the presentation at Chinon."

She sketched a bow before him, tripped, and recovered her balance with a burst of laughter. In the past few days, her exploits had grown more and more reckless. She had bought a bottle of whisky at the grocery in Azay, and, at the tobacco shop, had demanded cigarettes that the good woman had never heard of. She wheedled a strange music, full of dissonances, out of her piano, and spent hours over *Michael Strogoff*, which she had found among her brothers' books.

"Do you belong to the Action Française?" she asked Molinoff.

"The Action Française? What is that?"

"Then you don't?"

She pirouetted about, disappeared into the al-

cove, and announced to her aunt that she was not going to Chinon.

At the same moment, the President of the Royalist Maids of Montsoreau returned to Molinoff, a printed form, a pen, and a bottle of ink in her hand.

"Will you sign this?"

Elated at having brought such a distinguished recruit to the cause, she had no intention of letting her conquest escape. Molinoff read the paper.

"But I am not French," he pointed out.

"Heavens! You are not French?" The Royalist Maid turned pale and scurried towards Mme. de La Huppe, her bottle of ink and the pen still clutched in one hand.

"He's not French!" she lamented.

"Not French, not French!" snorted Mme. de La Huppe. "What difference does that make? M. de Molinoff is a gallant gentleman. He is a Russian, one of our allies. He will be an allied member of the Action Française."

"An allied member, to be sure! An allied member. . . ."

Molinoff was willing to be anything that was asked of him, provided he could continue to feel this affection and warm interest about him. He loved all these delightful people, who had gathered to plan their greeting to their future Queen. The thought of being their ally, and greeting this daughter of the royal family with them, filled him with a delight that, under any other circumstances, would have made him weep.

He signed the paper.

"What are you writing?" asked Françoise, appearing at his elbow.

"My pledge to die for your King."

"You are joining the Action Française? Then I must learn my bow at once."

Thus she flew from one idea to the next, colouring each of her thoughts, with a mimetic instinct proper to young girls in love, to match the hue of her cavalier's.

Molinoff's alliance with the party brought him enthusiastic approval. His youth and distinction would give a lustre to the Royalist troops in this little corner of Touraine, which they had hitherto lacked. These militiamen, who were thor-

oughly peaceable at heart, felt assured of finding in him a true leader; that is to say, a man who would be the first to receive blows and the first to dangle from a convenient gallows. They complimented him with a warmth that was largely gratitude.

Anne d'Eglantier took both of his hands in hers, and gazed tenderly into his eyes. "I am so happy," she murmured. "I shall see you Monday," she added, "at the reception at Chinon."

They were all eager to teach the new convert his catechism. Comtesse Le Fort, with tears in her eyes, told him the story of an aged coachman, who had contributed six francs and sixty-five centimes to the fund of the Action Française, "for the return of the King."

"Perhaps all the savings he had in the world," she said, blinking her eyes rapidly, "but our paper is full of such incidents. The lower classes are rallying to our standard: valets and cooks. . . ."

The Maid of Montsoreau flitted from group to group, overflowing with praise of her new member: "And, you know, he is orthodox. What a jolt that will be for the Archbishop!"

Perhaps it should be explained that, at that time, relations between the Action Française and the Vatican were somewhat strained. The Pope, in accord with his heavenly Master, was of the opinion that peace was more fitting to men than war. But the philosophers of the Action Française had denounced this view as a heresy.

"And I am sure you agree with us?" said the Comte de La Huppe to Molinoff.

"Yes, indeed," replied Molinoff, with a sigh. "War is certainly preferable to peace. I remember when we finally entered Lemberg, after a long siege, and the prettiest Jewesses in the town were at our mercy. . . ."

"Ah!" said Mme. de La Huppe, who had heard these last words, "come over here and tell me about that."

She hoped to keep him for herself; but each of the others had his little word to say or bit of advice to give.

"You should know," continued M. de La Huppe, "that the Apostolic Penitentiary has confused the limits of the spiritual and the temporal in its decrees, and that the attack against

the Action Française by Cardinal Andrieux, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, was provoked by the lying reports of a traitor. . . ."

"Yes," interrupted Molinoff, "it was also a traitor who provoked the offensive at the Masurian Lakes, where I was shot through the breast."

"Through the breast? . . ." moaned Madame de La Huppe.

"To be sure," said Monsieur de La Huppe, "but at Bordeaux it was a much more serious matter."

For it seemed that, at Bordeaux, cardinals had risked their hats and doctors of the Church had trembled on the brink of schism. Bishops had stood, crook in hand, on the Cathedral steps, Sunday morning after mass, and excommunicated daring boys who had sold copies of the Royalist paper, *Action Française,* under their noses; devout Catholics had been refused the sacrament on their death-beds.

"Never mind," said Molinoff, "these things will all be adjusted in time."

"But, Monsieur!" exclaimed the Comte de La

Huppe, "the last thing in the world we want is to have them adjusted."

Unfortunately, Molinoff was no longer listening. As the hour grew late, he felt the exhilaration that had sustained him beginning to wane. Among these people, who served neither whisky nor champagne at their receptions, that illusory state could not be prolonged at will. A vision of his kitchen and the dinner to be prepared floated before him. The radiance faded from his eyes; the mirrors showed him a dashing Molinoff, masquerading in another man's clothes.

"You mustn't leave," said Mme. de La Huppe, catching him in the hall. "I am keeping you for dinner. You still owe me that account of your tortures."

He felt his cheeks grow hot as he apologized: pressing duties summoned him to Fontecreuse before nightfall.

"Cruel," she sighed.

And, looking after him as he left:

"Ah, if we could only place a Russian on the Throne of France!"

X

The day at Chinon left those who had been admitted to the presence of Madame la Duchesse de Guyenne with a flattering memory and an intolerable ache in the legs.

The royal road across Touraine to Poitou once more saw the equipages of the good old days. The La Mothe-Razines arrived in a calash, which had preserved its gallant air, although grown dingy from neglect and drawn by a team of hastily curried farm horses. A few of the loyal came on horseback, entering the drawing-room with a jingle of spurs that was sweet to the ears of the ladies. Others had made the trip on foot, and bowed before Her Royal Highness white with the dust of devotion.

To relieve the monotony of shaking hands, which might have provoked a yawn from the Duchess, the leaders of the different sections had exerted their ingenuity in creating diversions.

Their aim had been to maintain, throughout the ceremony, an atmosphere of the times when kings had ruled France.

Each one did his part. The dowager Marquise de Servanes carried a stuffed parrot, which, it is true, interfered with her bow; but the parrot had been the favourite bird of Mme. de Pompadour, offered to Marshal de Servanes, after its death, and preserved in the family with pious care. . . . The Baronne de Tournepied fingered a snuff-box which had been presented by Louis XV to a Tournepied whose wife had obtained the favour of sharing the royal bed. Fichus of Alençon lace quivered at expectant throats and long trains swept a whiff of naphtha into the air.

M. de La Huppe presented an aged peasant woman, named Farineau, who had trudged six leagues on foot to see her Queen: "Give her a crown from my bag," said the good Duchess.

A group of Action Française students entered the room, shouting the *Song of M. de Charrette.* The Royalist Union of Sausage Manufacturers of Langeais, wearing the uniform of their corporation—a white apron over a sky-blue blouse—

offered Her Royal Highness a bouquet of fleurs-de-lis, in which the petals were made of lard and the leaves of pressed sausages. Several priests were boldly presented with copies of the forbidden paper, *Action Française*, in their hands: they were acclaimed in defiance of the Vatican.

The Duchess, prompted in whispers by the district secretaries, had the right word for each of her subjects. Her remarks, to be sure, were not distinguished; but, falling from her royal lips, they were gathered up with fervour, and destined to be cherished in many family traditions. "As the Duchesse de Guyenne once said to my grandfather," the descendants of an old huntsman of Poitou would some day say, "hunting is a good sport."

M. d'Eglantier was thrown into a flutter by Her Highness's reference to the d'Eglantier who had perished on the scaffold.

"What a memory!" he exclaimed, forgetting the little paper M. de La Huppe held in the palm of his hand.

But the Comte Le Fort's experience was less happy. The descendant of the Comtes d'Anjou

found himself stuck in the line between the Princesse Amédée de Broglie and M. René Benjamin. He could hardly have been better eclipsed. Madame la Duchesse de Guyenne passed from the effusions of the elderly princess to the elegant greeting of the novelist without paying the slightest attention to the unknown person between them. Thus it was that the author of *Gaspard* received the compliments that had been planned for the last of the Le Forts. The Count withdrew in a huff, and from that moment he meditated transferring his allegiance to the Legitimist party, of which he later became one of the most influential oracles.

Meanwhile, the Duchess was beginning to show signs of a royal weariness. She received her subjects with the automatic politeness of those in public life: she asked questions and smiled, but the smile that appeared and died in the same instant on her lips was no more than a nervous habit; and the replies to her questions penetrated no farther than the pearls in her ears.

When M. de La Huppe announced the Comte de Molinoff, the foreign ring of this name seemed

to rouse Her Royal Highness from her lethargy; her face lighted up, and her smile played spontaneously about her parted lips.

"Comte de Molinoff?" she repeated, turning towards M. de La Huppe.

"An allied member of the Action Française," explained the secretary.

As if this fact were inadequate to explain the charm of this handsome young man, Mme. la Duchesse de Guyenne detained Molinoff at her side and chatted with him, talking intently of the shower they had had the day before, but agreeing that on the whole it had been an unusually fair summer and that the climate of Touraine was the best in the world.

This extraordinary favour disconcerted the other delegations, whose slow progress before their future Queen was held up for at least five minutes. The President of the Royalist Maids of Montsoreau enjoyed the sweetest moment of her spinster's existence. Anne and Françoise d'Eglantier felt an unknown emotion unfolding within them; it was the twenty-first they had felt within the past three weeks, for each day

had brought them a new revelation concerning the state of their hearts. Seeing their friend singled out by the Duchess, they discovered that a young woman may feel proud over an honour bestowed on a young man.

But Molinoff, having concluded his interview, passed with a melancholy air through the groups that pressed about him. This reserve on the part of the favourite was greatly admired.

Mme. de La Huppe was waiting for him.

"You may congratulate yourself," she murmured. "Your position at court, when the great day comes, is assured. You may even become Chamberlain. . . ."

On the way home, Molinoff drove at a hard, steady trot. A fine rain was falling now, driven against his face by the wind. The countryside was enveloped in dusk and haze.

As he was about to enter the forest of Chinon, on the road to Azay, he overtook a man, tramping in the rain, who hailed him and asked for a ride as far as the village.

"Climb in," said Molinoff.

The man settled himself on the seat like a wet dog, exhaling an odour of steaming wool, white wine, and Saint-Maure cheese. He offered Molinoff a plug of tobacco and plunged at once into conversation. Although by no means reticent, he lacked ease in speaking; and he made up for this by jetting a stream of tobacco-juice at each comma. He talked volubly of himself, out of a nervous desire to be polite and by way of an introduction. He was Jules Fougereau, a farmer; he lived at Preux, not far from Azay; he was a widower, and his two sons had been killed in the war.

"And that's the long and the short of it," he said.

He shot out a final squirt of tobacco-juice and waited.

"And you?" he asked after a pause.

"Me?" replied Molinoff. "I am a cook."

"A cook? You don't say so . . . not a bad trade, eh?"

"It's a coward's trade, Fougereau."

The poor man, taken aback by this, could find no answer; he nodded his head and spat accu-

rately between his knees at the floor of the tilbury.

"A coward's trade," repeated Molinoff. "And a man who follows it should be despised. You may despise me."

"Don't worry about that, my boy," said the other, "it's as good a trade as the next one. And besides, as they say, it keeps a man alive."

The shafts of light from the carriage lamps wavered on each side of them through gusts of rain, to the shining trunks of the beeches. Molinoff brought the horse to a walk.

"Listen to me, Jules Fougereau . . ." he began.

Then, in a harsh voice, to the accompaniment of the creaking of the springs and the rasping of the wheels on the stony road, the favourite of Mme. la Duchesse de Guyenne enumerated the sins that he attributed to himself, the mildest of which was barely intelligible to the sturdy peasant sitting beside him. Jules Fougereau listened in silence to tales of massacres, lit by burning homes, crackling with machine-guns, and rippling with blood. Women fell on their knees be-

fore their executioners; judges and village councillors died with a malediction on their lips.

"And I let it happen," groaned Molinoff. "I let it happen."

He beat his breast, and the thud of his blows sank into the heavy mist. His epic of sinfulness leaped from one incident to another, coiled back on itself, swept across the plains of the Dnieper to the gorges of the Carpathians, returned to Kiev, became lost in the dives of Budapest, and emerged on the Prater at Vienna.

"They put a hunting-horn to my lips, a frying-pan in my hand, a placard on my back. And I let it happen, Jules Fougereau. I have always let things happen!"

The farmer offered him a chew of tobacco:

"What sort of crops do they grow in that part of the world?" he asked.

The tears were mingling with the rain now on Molinoff's face and he tasted the salt on his lips. Once more his confession began its torrential course, crossing Europe from east to west, pausing at Geneva and Paris to list the most trifling faults, misdemeanours that would barely

keep a police-court awake. "A despicable creature," he declared, "A deserter from his duty." He ground his teeth and covered his eyes with his hands.

"Now you know Molinoff as he is," he concluded, in a voice suddenly eased of its strain. "You are an honest man, Fougereau; judge him."

He wiped his dripping face; his groans ceased. He felt that his heart, having opened itself to this stranger, had been purified, like a country house that one returns to after years of absence. The shutters thrown back and the windows opened, all the foul air, the flies, and the rusty smells are driven out; the dust is shaken from the curtains and the colours come out fresh and gay; the gilding on the legs of the chairs and tables glitters under the lamps, and the family portraits smile at each other from frame to frame.

"As I make it out," said Jules Fougereau, after long reflection, "you have been juggling with your employers' accounts. Now, we might come to a little understanding. . . ."

He gave Molinoff a friendly tap on the knee,

mentioned the market price of chickens and eggs, and the rise in the price of geese, now that winter was coming on; then he outlined a little proposal that would be to their common advantage:

"If you tell them that you are paying fifty-five francs a pair for chickens, there will be five francs in it for you on each pair and . . ."

"What the devil are you driving at?" interrupted Molinoff. "Who do you think I am?"

"Now, there's no need for you to get angry. I merely understood ——"

"Well, what did you understand?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

And to himself, the farmer added:

"The poor fellow has been drinking."

Molinoff snapped his whip and Buria broke into a trot. A sudden gaiety had taken possession of the deserter from his duty; he cracked the whip in the air, songs of his youth rose to his lips, and his unburdened soul soared above the rain-sodden forest.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, slapping his companion on the back, "it is wonderful to be alive!"

"Well, if wheat stays at one hundred and eighty, we shan't have anything to complain about."

At the foot of the hill, as they were passing through Azay, Fougereau got out and proposed a glass of beer. But Molinoff declined and turned off on the road to Fontecreuse, while the glazed door of a workmen's café swung to behind this stranger who had delivered him from himself.

XI

His success at the reception of Chinon involved Molinoff in social obligations from which he could not escape.

Henceforth, he was to be seen at the Comtesse Le Fort's teas, at bridge at M. de Servanes', and on the tennis court at Beauchêne. His hosts competed for the privilege of entertaining this reserved young foreigner, who devoted only a few hours of his day to pleasure, and the rest of his time—or at least, so it was whispered—to experiments in the chemistry of foods.

But presently a rumour spread about that M. de Molinoff's scientific activities had quite a different purpose than that of nourishment; it was confidentially reported that he was plotting against the rabble at Moscow, and that, in the isolation of Fontecreuse, he was manufacturing bombs. It was also said that he was assisted in this task by a Spanish nun—an agent of Primo de

Rivera—and a family of Fascist Italians. As for that man who claimed to be a South American, he might well be . . . after all, why not? . . . a Grand Duke in disguise.

"Nonsense!" protested M. de La Huppe, when this story was brought to him. "M. de Molinoff lives at Fontecreuse like a gentleman—he does nothing. He is waiting."

"Waiting for what, or whom?" asked the General.

"For the Restoration, General."

"He'll wait a long time for that."

"A long time? Read Maurras' last article. The Republic is driving France into disaster at such a pace that Monseigneur le Duc de Guyenne, as I happen to know, has already made out the programme for his entry into Paris. Besides, M. de Molinoff is held in great favour at the Court ——"

"At the Court?"

"Didn't you know that Her Royal Highness took him into her confidence at Chinon?"

M. de Servanes favoured the theory of the plot and advised discretion: it would be unwise to in-

terrupt M. de Molinoff's humanitarian labours by attracting the attention of the government, which everybody knew was in the pay of Moscow.

Hence Molinoff's reticence was met with a courteous reserve, and all would have been well with the allied member of the Action Française, had he not been sought after with such fervour by the ladies.

For Mme. de La Huppe's effusions were now supplemented by the maternal devotion of the Comtesse Le Fort.

Since the battle of Dead Man's Hill, the Comtesse Le Fort had tried in vain to find consolation in her singing for the death of her two sons. Each day she sat down at the piano for her dose of Massenet or Chaminade, as a neurasthenic takes his veronal, increasing the amount steadily until she could no longer do without it. Even when she was visiting, or receiving guests herself, she would say, "It's time for my Fauré," as others say, "It's time for my medicine." And she would sing.

Her meeting with Molinoff had interrupted her musical treatment. At first she contented herself with inviting the young Russian to sing duets with her; then she ceased to sing herself and listened to him; presently she ceased to listen, and merely gazed at him. All the unspent love that her heart contained overflowed on him. She called him "my boy," then "my child," and finally, "Ivan."

She hovered about him with unnecessary attentions, rescued him from draughts, and cautioned him to drive carefully whenever he set out in his tilbury. She knitted a bright orange scarf for him with irregular, childlike stitches. She worried for fear he was not properly cared for at Fontecreuse, and dreamed of coming to his room at night, to draw the covers over his shoulders. Did he at least have a glass of orange-water at his bedside?

"These boys," she would sigh, devouring him with her eyes, "one never has any peace with them."

And then, all this talk of bombs kept her in a state of constant apprehension.

One day after tea, as Molinoff was stepping into his carriage to return to the kitchen, she drew on her hat and climbed to the seat beside him.

"I am going with you," she announced. "My carriage will call at Fontecreuse later to bring me back."

At the same moment, a servant was wedging a large basket in the rear of the tilbury.

"Those are surprises," she whispered, "for dear little Ivan."

She talked to him as though he were a child and the basket held toys.

"No, no," stammered Molinoff. "You can't do that. You mustn't think of it."

"But I do, my boy. I think of it day and night. Your lonely existence torments me. The way you have been coughing today is enough to tear one's heart out. What sort of care do you take of yourself? Who will fix you something to soothe your throat tonight? I am going to see to all of that: it's my duty as a woman who once had sons. Now, make that horse of yours pick up his heels or we shall never get there."

Molinoff's will crumbled before the temptation to yield to the will of others.

"Very well," he said, shrugging the responsibility from his shoulders.

He flicked Buria on the ear with the tip of his whip, the horse started and broke into a gallop.

"Reckless boy!" scolded the Comtesse Le Fort. "Ah, if I didn't watch over him, what mad things he would do!"

She lectured him indignantly. Presently, the evening mist began to envelop the carriage; Molinoff coughed.

"Naturally, it never occurred to him to bring a coat."

She took off the blanket that covered her knees, and spread it over his shoulders.

"Young man," she said, "when you get home, you are going to do me the favour of getting into bed at once with a good mustard plaster on you."

On their arrival at Fontecreuse, he led her, with an air of mystery, to the smoking-room.

"Here is my room," he said, in a low voice.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "What dis-

order, what a jumble! Do you mean to say you live in this mare's nest, Ivan?"

"Yes, this is my room . . . that is to say, it's . . ."

"A pig-pen!"

"Yes, a . . . well . . ."

"Call the maid, you wretch. And bring me that basket that's in the carriage."

At the sight of a disordered bed and clothes strewn over chairs, her maternal habits asserted themselves. She stared with stupefaction at the half-emptied glasses on the table, amid a litter of neckties and razor-blades. She started to count the cigarette butts that dotted the floor but, arriving at fifty, gave up.

"You make me very unhappy," she told Molinoff, who was perched on the arm of a chair.

"So I realize," he admitted, "but life is difficult."

She scanned the shelves along the walls, hoping to form some idea of this outrageous youth's reading. She took down a box of cigars, which flapped open in her hand, showering the cigars to the floor.

"My poor boy, you are poisoning yourself."

She sighed; for a moment, she was discouraged before the task that confronted her.

"Come! Run out and get me that basket, and send the maid here."

Molinoff went out to unharness the horse and put away the carriage. He, too, felt saddened by this scene: he was tempted to throw himself at this excellent woman's feet, and confess his pathetic imposture. But, as he returned to the terrace, with the Comtesse Le Fort's basket under his arm, he recalled how Anne and Françoise had tripped up this gravel path. Those adorable girls had run across this terrace, danced up these steps, and crushed the rose petals that he had scattered over them under their feet. "Ah!" he said to himself, "they must never know."

In the smoking-room, he found the Countess struggling with the bear skins and panther skins.

"Is this your bed?" she asked. "I don't see any sheets."

"Yes, that sort of bed doesn't need sheets. You see . . ."

"You are hopeless!"

She opened the basket, which was bursting with all the things that mothers prize. She drew out a nose and throat atomizer, tubes of menthol and eucalyptus, and a handful of books, including Jacques Maritain's *Letters to a Young Man of Our Times.*

Molinoff left her thus occupied, and scurried to the kitchen, where he chopped up onions and parsley, tossed the ingredients of a cream of celery into the pot that Pia held out for him, and returned. To prevent his hands from betraying the use he had just made of them, he kept them in his pockets.

His self-appointed mother once more demanded the maid; but it seemed that the maid was not to be found.

"Well, then, the cook."

"The cook?"

He ran back to the kitchen, stirred his soup, mixed a sauce, and trimmed the steak, brushing Pia out of his way.

"Are you still angry with me?" she whimpered.

Back into the smoking-room like a gust of wind: no cook!

"My poor child, your servants flout you and trick you and rob you under your very nose!"

She gazed at him with pity.

"Really, Ivan, I don't want to meddle in things that are none of my business, but do you even know what you pay for butter?"

"Eighteen francs fifty."

She stared in amazement.

"That's for the best table butter," he added. "But you can get a very good quality at seventeen fifty. I use that for cooking, except in cream noodles, sliced bananas Cuban style, and Mexican corn."

The good lady could not believe her ears. For fifteen years she had been trying to teach her cook to use a cheaper grade of butter for cooking, and now she learned that this youngster had succeeded where she had failed. She stopped folding pyjamas and giving advice, to ask questions. He astounded her by his knowledge of household matters; she noted down recipes for violet jelly and pigeon seasoned with paprika. He explained

the saving in burning pea-coal and its superiority to the coarser grades.

"But, Ivan, where did you learn such things?"

"Oh . . . the contingencies of life . . ."

"And I thought you were just a child!"

At heart, she was disappointed; she would have preferred to have found him helpless, and betrayed by his cook.

But a ray of hope flickered in her mind.

"Now that I think of it," she said, lowering her voice, "probably you use this butter and paprika and all these spices in your chemical experiments, for your bombs?"

"My bombs?"

She leaned close to his ear:

"I know all about it. You don't have to be discreet with me."

She repeated the gossip of the neighbourhood: that he was plotting against the Bolsheviks and inventing new explosives.

"When I think of the danger you expose yourself to! My boy, I don't want to intrude, and I understand your silence on this matter, but at least tell me that you are careful, that . . ."

This mother, deprived of sons to worry over, had at last found something to appease her need for anxiety: a cold that might develop into bronchitis, and chemical experiments that carried death in their retorts. It was more than enough to make her bless the fate that had sent her this incalculable youth.

She resumed her task, grumbling over it and enchanted by it. She refused to be satisfied until Molinoff had brought her sheets; she fretted over his sleeping in a badly ventilated room, reeking with whisky and tobacco smoke; and up to the moment that her carriage called for her, she fumed, in a happy rage, against disorder, carelessness, and cigarette ashes.

Left to himself, Molinoff stirred his sauces and reflected apprehensively on the importance he seemed to have assumed in his neighbours' thoughts, as well as in the hearts of their wives and daughters.

His ambition had been surpassed. He had wished for nothing more than peace; a peace broken by an occasional worldly pleasure, a cup

of tea, or a hand at bridge. He had hoped to drop in from time to time and smoke a cigarette with men of his own world, to sit in their arm-chairs, where their ancestors had sat before them, and join them in denouncing the Republic: this was all that he had expected from his adventure.

And, for that matter, his neighbours had appeared glad to accept him, disputing the privilege of pouring their woes into new ears. Finishing out their lives on their estates, which there were no longer any sons to inherit, these superannuated noblemen could only lament the passing of the good old times: the times they had cursed under Waldeck-Rousseau, and which they now looked back on as the golden age.

Marked for the tax-bureau's inquisition by the deceptive appearance of wealth, they considered the radical collector in their county a personal enemy, and a hostile judge. It was they who paid for all the tax-dodging farmers of the countryside; they who repaired the roofs under which their farmer-tenants were hoarding money.

Molinoff received their confidences without asking for them, became acquainted with the

shrinkage of their fortunes and the worries caused by rents that were paid in paper francs. In short, he had become their friend: it was all that he asked.

XII

"Two letters for you, Signor Molinoff," announced Pia, coming into the kitchen.

The only letters that Molinoff received were short notes from his employer, who exhorted him, once a week, to take good care of Mme. Cortés, and supplemented this advice by enclosing menus from the restaurants of Biarritz, by which, as he suggested, Molinoff might be inspired, and Mme. Cortés enabled to share the pleasures that her husband was enjoying away from her.

But these two envelopes were addressed to the Comte de Molinoff, one on handsome ochre paper, sealed with a large coat of arms, and the other on pale blue paper, covered with a dainty, timid handwriting.

The first letter was signed: Paulo Pinto Silvares da Costa, Bishop of Mossamedes. It invited Molinoff to a literary tea, at the episcopal

residence, on Saturday of the following week.

The second was signed: Françoise. He read it at a glance, reread it, crumpled it in his fist and, throwing himself on a kitchen chair, burst into sobs.

"Get out of here!" he shouted to Pia, who fled without a word.

This was what Françoise d'Eglantier had written:

"Come early for tennis tomorrow. I have arranged for us to be alone for a moment. My life, my happiness . . . depend on that moment."

She had printed a little row of dots after her happiness. . . . Then, she loved him, she called to him, she offered her life to him! The pains he had taken to behave like an older brother with the two sisters had brought this result: the life, the happiness, of a young girl depended on a moment alone with him.

"You idiot!" he cried. "You quadruple coward!"

He pictured Françoise entering his kitchen, discovering the true Ivan, and retreating in horror.

"You brought it on yourself," he said, "you fool, you brought it on yourself."

That this little slip of paper, bearing their two names traced by the same hand, should have entered such a base setting, was itself a sacrilege. He reread the note for the last time, tore it into fine pieces, and then, closing his eyes and returning in imagination to his former free existence, he swallowed it word by word. It was the act of a madman.

As the last word—Françoise's signature—was disappearing between his lips, the kitchen door opened and Sister Encarnación appeared, to inquire the cause for the delay in Madame's lunch.

"Ah," said Molinoff, leaping to his feet, "if there is a devil, it is in me that he dwells!"

He kissed the cross that hung from the nun's chaplet and beat his brow against the tiles of the floor. Sister Encarnación, being a nurse, was accustomed to all the manifestations of fever. She advised him to take quinine and to bathe his feet in hot mustard water. Then she rescued the squash and Parmesan cheese, which was begin-

ning to stick to the bottom of the pan, and carried it upstairs herself to Mme. Cortés.

The last fine days of autumn, in Touraine, are limpid with a matchless charm. The grapes are gathered, the vines turn golden. The earth, having nothing more to produce and welcoming the tardy caresses of the sun, releases its true earthly fragrance. From the thickets comes the last thin song of the wrens, in three notes. The air is blue along the edge of the woods, mauve over the sand bars of the Loire. Nature offers an example of appeasement, counselling serenity.

But such counsel had no effect on Molinoff.

On the way to Beauchêne, he sighed, waved his arms in the air, and discoursed to his horse on love, cowardice, and honour.

Anne and Françoise were already on the tennis court, volleying, when he arrived.

"What marvellous weather!" cried Françoise.

It was her way of saying: "I am eighteen years old—my heart is overflowing—I love you." For what she had not yet learned to confess to a man,

she could declare openly to the trees, the sun, and the infinite bowl of the sky.

"I am playing alone against you two," she added. "Ready! . . ."

The set began with her service, and she sent over a succession of swift, accurate balls, as deadly as stones from a sling. Anne could not return any of them; Molinoff made little effort.

"Game!" cried Françoise. "Your service."

The racket trembled in Molinoff's hand. Separated from him merely by a net—by all of life—stood this eager, joyous girl, whose happiness, she had written, depended on a moment with him. He could feel her glance, as direct and unequivocal as her service, fixed on him.

"Well?" she asked, "are you dreaming?"

"I believe so," replied Molinoff.

When he served it was feebly, with the awkwardness of a beginner.

"Are you ill?" asked Anne.

"Of course not," said Françoise, "don't you see he is trying to tease us?"

She laughed softly, thinking: "He loves me."

But suddenly her happiness seemed to make

her as awkward as Molinoff, for she swung wildly at the ball and sent it high over the wall.

"Françoise! Pay attention!" cried Anne.

When the game was finished, Molinoff went out to look for the lost ball. Today it was he who opened the little gate on the road, and his canvas shoes that were stained green by the nettles in the ditch. He forgot the ball that had just been lost; he remembered a former one, a girl in white appearing in the gate, and the confusion in his heart at the shimmering sight. He turned and looked back at the narrow opening, through which the low rays of the sun were shining. What happiness was it, to which he had imagined that gate could admit him?

A hesitant shadow fell across the sunny strip of road outside the gate. Françoise had appeared: the same slim figure in white.

"Can't you find it?" she asked uncertainly.

Then, coming to his side:

"Listen. . . . I must tell you something . . . something . . ."

"No, no," he interrupted, "you mustn't tell me anything."

"You have guessed?"

He nodded desperately. She watched him with an amazed and delighted smile. Then, turning away from him and tucking her racket under one arm, she slipped her hand into the throat of her sweater and drew out a tiny blue silk sachet, still warm from the intimacy of its hiding-place.

"Quick!" she whispered, "this is for you."

And aloud:

"Well, never mind the ball. I'll send César to look for it."

They strolled back to the court, where Anne was waiting impatiently. Molinoff made blunder after blunder. Françoise played in a frenzy: the balls no longer touched the gravel, but bounded against the wire lattice or sailed clear over it.

"What difference does it make?" she cried. "Let's go in the house and have a drink of whisky." She tossed her racket in the air and caught it by the handle; spun the crank to let down the net.

". . . and smoke a cigarette," she added.

"Don't mind her," said Anne, "she is crazy.

It's just her joy at having been received at Chinon by our dear Duchess.

M. d'Eglantier was waiting for them at the entrance to the bus.

"An invitation for you, my children," he said. "A bishop, whom I don't know but who appears to be a friend of M. de Molinoff and the La Huppes, has asked us to a literary tea next Saturday."

"Another sermon on charity," suggested Françoise.

"Or a bulletin from the Apostolic Penitentiary," said Anne. "Do you know this bishop?" she asked Molinoff.

Molinoff gave a confused account of the visit he had received at Fontecreuse, and added that he had been invited to the tea, but . . .

"In that case, we will go," decided Françoise.

Anne was less prompt in accepting.

"Did he seem to be on our side?" she wanted to know.

"On your side?"

"Yes, against the Pope."

"I am sure I don't know," said Molinoff. "He looked like any other good prelate."

"Well, let's go, anyway," said Anne. "Monseigneur de Tours has come out publicly in favour of the Pope, and we have no archbishop at all now. This one may be useful to us."

Once more, Molinoff allowed himself to be led by others; the two sisters decided that he would accompany them and their father on this journey of exploration across the Loire. And Françoise brought out the decanter of whisky.

Now, whisky usually gave Molinoff a glow of happiness and an increased confidence in himself. He drank it neat, to the great admiration of Françoise, who could barely moisten her tongue in it.

This time he disposed of two glassfuls in a swallow apiece; but the exhilaration did not come. He gazed again at Françoise: she was leaning back in her chair, drawing on her cigarette and, with charming awkwardness, sending little whirls of blue smoke drifting over her head.

"I suppose you know," she said, "that everybody around here is mad about you."

"Aunty La Huppe thinks that the Duchesse de Guyenne," added Anne, "would be glad to see you at the head of any group of the Action Française you wished."

Molinoff laughed bitterly.

"A royal idea," he said, "and the characteristic of royal ideas is that they are floated without weighing the consequences. In the first place, I am a foreigner. . . ."

"When the welfare of the King is at stake," interrupted Anne, "nationality does not count. The Duchess herself is Montenegrin. And didn't her son, Prince Henri, marry a Dane?"

She appeared to reflect for a moment. Then, looking into Molinoff's eyes and stressing each of her words:

"And, besides, you might marry a Frenchwoman some day."

"Yes, of course," said Françoise.

Molinoff gulped down a third glass of whisky; it was his method of clarifying his ideas.

"A Frenchwoman?" he said.

His eye travelled around the little drawing-room where he already felt so much at home:

Anne had brought her needle and thread and a piece of embroidery from the work-table; the horizontal rays of the sun fell across her lap, lighting up her nimble fingers, as they worked, with a soft flush; the warm air was fragrant with fresh tobacco smoke and a powder that he had learned to associate with Françoise; on the wall, the ancestors looked down from their frames with a smile of satisfaction. It was one of those intimate moments that it is sweet to prolong.

"A Frenchwoman?" he repeated.

"Why not?" asked Anne, biting off the thread.

Molinoff set his empty glass on a stand, spread out both arms on the back of the sofa, crossed his legs, and, blowing a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling:

"You are right," he said, smiling. "Why not?"

XIII

Fearing that he might be late for tea at the Bishop of Mossamedes', Molinoff had again served lunch an hour ahead of time.

Most of the morning had been spent in polishing his boots and brushing his clothes. He had chosen the handsomest suit he could find in his employer's wardrobe, and he tingled with impatience to see himself in it. After every half dozen strokes of the brush, he paused to feel in his pocket for a little blue sachet, drew from it a handkerchief embroidered with his monogram in a cluster of forget-me-nots, and raised it to his lips.

He smiled and wept at the same time. Pia was in terror of him.

During the past week he had specialized in fritters and tarts, moulded into the form of a heart, a capital F, or an eglantine. Mme. Cortés was nourished exclusively on love charms. Even-

tually they turned her stomach and she grew angry.

When she had finished lunch, she summoned her cook. He appeared with that sad and dignified air of those whom the gods have chosen to be the butts of their malice.

"What are all these indigestible things you have been feeding me?" she rumbled.

"Those are fritters, Madame," explained Molinoff, "symbolical fritters."

"Symbolical?"

"Of love, of hope . . ."

The good woman was still susceptible to memories of serenades: love and hope were words that could pierce the thick layers of her fat. She raised her heavy lids and looked searchingly at Molinoff, whose lips fluttered with a smile of resignation.

"You may leave the room," she said to Sister Encarnación.

Then, folding her hands over her paunch:

"Love and hope? . . ." she resumed, lingering on the words.

He answered with a sigh, and passed his hand

across his brow. A sigh from Mme. Cortés replied to his.

"Love . . ." she murmured. "But why in a frying-pan, eh?"

Then she seemed to receive a sudden illumination. The gelatine of her neck quivered, and her hand, describing a vast detour, arrived at her throat.

"Is it you who are in love?" she cried.

She fumbled for a pack of cards in the pocket of her arm-chair, and ordered Molinoff to bring up the half-moon table, which fitted her unusual dimensions. Then she spread out the cards in a five-pointed star and addressed an incantation to certain ones: she questioned the queen of hearts, who refused to answer; she set her apart from the rest, and demanded a reply. But, still meeting with no success, she turned to the queen of spades, and this lady apparently had no hesitation in revealing Molinoff's secret, for Mme. Cortés ceased her incantations, lit a cigarette, and, turning towards Molinoff:

"She is young, and she loves you in secret, eh?"

Touched to the heart, Molinoff exclaimed:

"Ah, Madame, you have divined the truth!"

". . . and she wants to marry you."

Mme. Cortés shook with satisfaction at her own powers.

"Good!" she concluded, "We will arrange this at once. Send her up here."

"Send whom, Madame?"

"Pia, of course."

"Pia? . . ."

"Tell her parents to come too. I want to assure them in person that I shall make no objections to your marrying her."

"I, marry Pia?"

"Now, listen to me, young man, I don't want any disorderly behaviour in my house, eh? You needn't think that, because I lie in this arm-chair all day, I don't know what goes on around me."

"But I assure you, Madame, that Pia is not in love with me. If she were, I should have noticed it."

"Tut, tut. You can't contradict the cards."

Molinoff could find no answer to this argument.

"You see?" reinforced Mme. Cortés.

But the time was too short for Molinoff to argue further with the queen of spades. His thoughts were on the break, which he was to meet at three o'clock at Beauchêne, and the clothes he had still to put on, the tie he had not yet chosen. He edged towards the door.

"Wait a minute," said Mme. Cortés.

She now prepared to question the cards concerning the sentiment of the knave of hearts for the queen of spades. Having made Molinoff cut the pack, she arranged the cards first in a fan, then in a square and finally in a circle; but something appeared to prevent her from reading the answer.

"Who is this little blonde that gets in my way every time, eh?"

"A blonde?" said Molinoff, "I . . . I can't imagine. . . . Perhaps Sister Encarnación."

Mme. Cortés shrugged her shoulders, until the layers of her neck vibrated.

"Don't be ridiculous, my boy. Does a nun have hair?"

"True," said Molinoff, with a forced laugh.

Then, profiting by Mme. Cortés' absorption

in a new arrangement of the cards, he tiptoed across the room. He could hear her whispering: "One, two, three, four, five. . . . A short journey. . . . One, two, three, four, five . . . with . . . with a blonde woman. Santa Madre, that blonde again! One . . . two . . . three . . ."

On "four," he reached the threshold; on "five," he crossed it.

A moment later, he was in the kitchen. Pia was finishing up the dishes; her skinny arms glittered with greasy water.

"There's no more kitchen soap, Signor Molinoff," she said.

"Very well," said Molinoff. "I shall go buy some at once."

XIV

Françoise drove the break, with Molinoff seated beside her. M. d'Eglantier and Anne sat in the rear with the Comte and Comtesse de La Huppe. All of them felt that this jaunt across the Loire was an adventure, and entered upon it enthusiastically. The October mildness, Molinoff's radiant youth, and the curiosity aroused by a visit to a strange bishop, rarefied the atmosphere about them. Françoise hummed as she kept the horses at a brisk trot. Mme. de La Huppe admired Molinoff's shoulders and the back of his neck, which was slender and muscular.

M. de La Huppe wore the fleur-de-lis in his scarf-pin; Anne wore it in her heart.

They crossed the Loire by the suspension bridge at Langeais. At the clatter of their hoofs on the planks, the horses grew frightened, reared, and shied towards the flimsy hand-rail. Mme. de La Huppe screamed; her husband shouted con-

tradictory advice to Françoise. But horses have as little taste for the antics of men and women as for wooden bridges. Belgian Hare and Dragon II lost their heads and broke into a gallop. Not until then did Molinoff lean towards Françoise and place his hands gently over hers, guiding them by the mere pressure of his own. In a few yards, the horses had quieted, and stopped. But Mme. de La Huppe had still to be brought back to her senses, though by different means. She moaned; she begged for air—breathing, as she was, at that moment, the purest air in France. Her eyes closed, and she appeared on the verge of fainting. Once more it was Molinoff who exorcized the demon of hysteria. Quietly pushing the awkward and furious husband aside, he seated himself by the half-unconscious woman. Now, Mme. de La Huppe was in the habit of concealing a few loose folds of flesh in her throat under a trim little band of black silk; with a light touch, Molinoff loosed the catch of this band: it was all that was needed. Reason returned at once to this middle-aged coquette. She snatched the ribbon from her rescuer's hands, caught it hur-

riedly about her throat, and said in a casual tone:

"You are making us lose time, Françoise. Why don't you drive faster?"

On the right bank of the Loire, one enters upon the Champs-Élysées of France. Luxurious motors, of American and English make, roll over dustless roads; elegant pedestrians, in walking breeches and crimson jerseys, stroll by bareheaded, for this is one of the sunniest promenades in Europe. The lawns of private residences touch elbows with dignified reserve; particoloured shutters lend discretion to windows that open on the murmur of traffic.

The arrival of M. d'Eglantier's break in these surroundings attracted attention by the unfamiliar creak of iron wheels and the horses' ringing trot. Belgian Hare and Dragon II laid back their ears as they passed roadsters driven by young women with short, flying hair. A motor coach overtook them and rumbled by, crowded with tourist mannikins, listening impassively to a lecture from a uniformed attendant, standing by the driver. Klaxons rasped in their ears, and exhaust valves belched under their

noses. Mme. de La Huppe, who had raised her parasol, clung to it with both hands, expecting to see it torn from her by the breath of these insolent engines.

Imperceptibly, each of the occupants of the carriage felt the tenor of his thoughts undergo a transformation. Removed from the ancestral stones of the left bank, from the peasants who bowed to her and with whom she chatted as a feudal mistress, Anne no longer felt so sure of the return of the King to the throne of France. Her father stared bitterly at the chalk cliffs, where La Rochejaquelein's soldiers had once fought, and which were now carved into terraces, studded with phœnix and palms. The La Huppes were discovering here what they had often lamented did not exist near Plessis-Puçay: houses of a fashionable air, where bridge was certainly in favour. But the Comte de La Huppe felt some humiliation at his ignorance of the names and rank of their owners. And, since they were unknown to him, he doubted their loyalty to the Action Française.

As for Molinoff, he had forgotten Fonte-

creuse, Pia, and the kitchen stove. He opened his nostrils to the smell of tar from the highway; his eyes to the crimson jerseys and the flowers in the gardens; his heart to the joy of living and being loved, of wearing a beige vest with pink stripes, and of knowing that, in the pocket of that vest, was folded a little handkerchief embroidered with forget-me-nots. The scent of elegance and worldliness that floated on the air intoxicated him.

"Is there a casino at Langeais?" he asked Françoise.

He felt that today good luck would surely be with him, that baccara would be his salvation, and that, with what was left of his month's wages, he would break the bank.

"A casino?" replied Françoise. "I don't know what that is."

"A gambling hall."

"I don't think there is anything of that kind in Langeais. Mme. Le Fort told me that there was a good piano-tuner there; the pastry-shop has a reputation that has reached us across the river; and you can get excellent sausages at

Martin's. That is all I know about it. But we might ask someone."

She too felt a yearning to gamble, but in a game that, as yet, she had no name for. This expedition had gone to her head. Driving the break, beside a man for whom she embroidered handkerchiefs in secret, lifted her to one of those delights beyond which no delight goes. And to prolong it, she drove slowly; at the slightest rise in the road, she brought the horses to a walk.

Thus they came to the village where Monseigneur da Costa lived.

Offering to inquire the way to the bishop's house, M. d'Eglantier got down, and, naturally enough, entered the church. But the beadle knew of no bishop in the neighbourhood except Monseigneur de Tours; and he was an archbishop, who came only once a year, for confirmation.

Meanwhile, Molinoff had got the information they needed in the tobacco-shop.

They soon came in sight of a charming Restoration villa, flowering with ivy geraniums and approached by a steep, winding drive. This was their goal.

"Fasten your collar, Françoise," said Mme. de La Huppe, "and remember that one does not cross one's legs before a bishop."

A dozen or more motors were lined up against the wall of the courtyard. A servant appeared as they drew up before the door.

"You may unharness the horses," said Monsieur d'Eglantier, "and give them a little oats, with a handful of hay. No water for half an hour."

The man explained, in broken French, that there were no stables at Monseigneur's, nor in fact any oats or hay; that horses had never been seen there before, and that he himself would be hard put to it to extricate the beasts from the shafts.

"All right," said Molinoff, "keep an eye on them until I come back."

Gusts of laughter reached them from the tennis court beyond the house, where a game of mixed doubles was in progress. The guests' chauffeurs, seated at a table under a yellowing chestnut tree, were playing ombre.

"Are you sure that Monseigneur da Costa

lives here?" asked Mme. de La Huppe, hesitating at the entrance to the drawing-room.

"Oh, yes, Madame," replied the maid who was ushering them in.

And indeed the Bishop, leaning against the marble mantelpiece, appeared to be occupied at that moment in reading his charge to a number of his flock, who were hanging on his words. The newcomers entered on tiptoe. Mme. de La Huppe glanced about her for the bowl of holy water. Anne crossed herself. "This is his private chapel," they thought, "and we have come at the hour of instruction."

They listened.

Monseigneur, weaving his amethyst gracefully in the air, read in suave tones:

> "Angel Heurtebise, recite the Ave.
> One foot on the tortoise, the other on
> The wing; thou jugglest thus with
> Feather and with cannon ball."

"He is talking about angels," murmured Françoise to Molinoff.

The audience appeared rapt in spiritual ecstasy. Tears trembled in the eyes of seductive

young women. One elderly lady clasped her hand over her heart to keep it from bursting. The men, huddled in the rear of the room, listened with that courteous and absent-minded air that they habitually assume when addressed on exalted matters.

The Bishop continued:

> "Angel or fire? Too late. Aim,
> Fire!
> He fell before the muskets of God's choir."

"It's Lucifer," whispered Françoise, whose logical mind had no difficulty in extracting subtleties from the Bishop's charge.

"It's a riddle," thought M. d'Eglantier. "It would be easier if he would draw it."

The elderly lady, whose heart had threatened to explode, sighed in English:

"These are not terrestrial words. . . . How divine!"

A young woman near her, with dark eyes glowing like embers, exclaimed:

"It's the speech of the holy Prophets!"

But Monseigneur, with the soft drawl of his native tongue, resumed his reading:

"Locks of angel Heurtebise, massive
Male sceptre, menace in the water,
And in milk, check the nursemaid's trunk.

"Angel Heurtebise . . .
Flower of the aorta, anthracite,
Hurricane of the cardinal points. . . ."

When he had ended his homily, the room crackled with applause. Ladies rose in their seats, crying, "Bravo!"

M. d'Eglantier, his daughters, the La Huppes, and Molinoff moved forward to pay their respects to the Bishop.

"Ah, Madame la Comtesse!" he exclaimed. "Do you not agree that you have just listened to one of the loveliest pages of Catholic poetry?"

"It is true," remarked M. d'Eglantier, "that it compares the angels with a nursemaid's trunk in the baggage-room, with a swan, and a sack of coal. That is the language of a modern Revelation."

"Yes," said the Bishop, "the poem is by Jean Cocteau, and Jean Cocteau, as you say, is a new Saint John."

Lady Bridgewater agreed with him fervently.

"Divine! . . ." she repeated.

M. d'Eglantier wished to persuade her that one could speak of the angels without checking them in the baggage-room. But he soon realized that he was preaching in the desert: Lady Bridgewater did not understand French.

Meanwhile, the Bishop was introducing the party to his other guests. Anne and Françoise were entrusted to two young Spaniards, the MM. Gonçalvez Peña y Solar, who took them out on the lawn. Molinoff was no sooner introduced than a cluster of young women from the Argentine surrounded him and took possession of him.

The Comtesse de La Huppe was eager to resume the question of the Pope and the Apostolic Penitentiary with this prelate who had escaped from her once before. But at the first words she uttered, with her usual ardour, the Bishop announced that he knew nothing at all about the subject.

"But, Monseigneur," she said, "I can explain it to you in two words."

She launched upon a tortuous and exclama-

tory discourse, in which temporal and spiritual matters, Alsatian autonomy, German finance, Minister Briand, and the Nuncio Ceretti were all involved. The good Bishop smiled, nodded his head, and raised one hand in a sign of peace.

"Come, come," he said, "God will take care of these matters."

"God will take care of . . . !" echoed Mme. de La Huppe. "The way things are going now, I sometimes wonder if He is not on the Pope's side, Himself."

"Who knows? . . ." said Monseigneur, lifting his eyes towards heaven. And he suggested that they go out on the lawn, to watch the final set of the tennis match: Peruvian Touraine against Swedish Touraine.

The Bishop's courts were noted for their excellent surface. It is still recalled that it was on this gravel, henceforth historic, that Helen Wills almost defeated Suzanne Lenglen. In describing this event, Monseigneur never failed to tell his guests that the famous French champion had asked him to bless her racket before the match, "and it was to my blessing," he would add with

a smile, "that Mlle. Lenglen was kind enough to attribute her victory that afternoon."

The young people, who had fled Monseigneur's traditional Saturday literary hour, were seated in tiers on the lawn, which sloped conveniently towards the courts. All the gentry of the neighbourhood were present: Arturo Lopez, Mr. and Mrs. H. W. Wilson, the two sons of the Pasha, Miss Grace Walker, Señorita Lola Pasadena, the Norwegian champion, Axel Hansen, and his fiancée, Mlle. Gerda Josefsen.

The match was followed with passionate interest. The Swede and his partner, supported by the blond sections of the public, were pressing the Peruvians hard. The audience applauded, and cheered in every language except French. Nearly all these young people had come to Touraine to learn the language of Voltaire and Anatole France; but on Monday, they went to Lady Bridgewater's; on Thursday, to the Pasha's; on Friday, to the Peña y Solars'; and on Saturday, to Monseigneur da Costa's. Thus, quite unintentionally, by following the natural slope down which their pleasures carried them, it had come about

that the Swedes were learning Spanish, and the Argentinians English.

"Here," said Monseigneur, "is the flower of Touraine. These dear children are kind enough, from time to time, to lighten the austerity of my hermitage."

Pleased at this unusual opportunity to learn French, and justify their parents' expense in sending them here, several others had now joined the Peña y Solars, and were carrying on a lively conversation with Anne and Françoise. Friendships take root easily about a tennis court, where one can always debate whether that last ball had really been out, and criticize or praise the players.

"I almost never make a good smash," said Françoise.

"That is because you have such marvellous blue eyes," replied Norberto Peña, gazing at her boldly from his black ones.

"What is the connexion?"

"None, but you are very charming."

Françoise was not trained in flirtatious duels. She blushed, and her embarrassment encouraged

the gallant Spaniard, who at once paid her reckless compliments on her hair, her teeth, and the curve of her throat.

"Oh, there is M. de Molinoff!" she said uneasily, "will you excuse me? I must speak to him."

Norberto Peña's words echoed in her head like a carillon. Molinoff had never talked of her eyes and teeth. She was divided between pleasure that a man had spoken to her in this tone and shame that she had listened to him. "Perhaps I really am pretty," she thought. "And if that is true, then . . ." Then, there was more joy than shame in her voice and movements as she joined Molinoff.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

Molinoff was no longer on this planet. The young women from the Argentine, looped with glowing pearls, had led him into the heaven of their elegances; they had talked of dances, baccara, and Deauville; they had made engagements for other teas on other days. . . .

"Ah," he said, "what an enchanted house! One can almost imagine that it is the beginning of a

fairy-tale: a violet prince receiving guests from the four corners of the world; the first has black eyes, the second has green eyes. . . . But the most beautiful has blue eyes."

This time Françoise did not blush; she felt an incomparable peace suffuse her heart.

"Do you believe in fairy-tales?" she asked.

"One must," he sighed.

At this moment, they were interrupted by a sudden clatter: a half dozen of the young people had discovered M. d'Eglantier's break, and with shouts and roars of laughter, were driving up and down the park. Gerda Josefsen, in a pale lemon sweater, preceded them, photographing them from every angle.

"Oh!" cried Françoise. "Poor Dragon! They will make him nervous; we shall never be able to drive home."

"God grant she's right," thought Molinoff.

She ran to the carriage and besought the drivers not to excite the horses. But they laughed and invited her to join them. They had not believed that there were still carriages drawn by horses on the banks of the Loire; they would send the pic-

tures to their friends in Montevideo and Oslo. And, as Françoise hesitated to climb into the already overladen break, they drove on without her.

The sun was dropping behind the villa; Sweden had defeated Peru; the hour for tea drew everybody towards the house.

Monseigneur's tea was served by the young ladies, who offered it without recommendation, for it was traditionally pallid. They themselves preferred cocktails, mixed in the pantry by the Peña y Solars with the Portuguese Bishop's port. But this afternoon the newcomers accepted the hot tea, and there was nearly a shortage of cups.

"I must show you my oratory," said Monseigneur to the Comte and Comtesse de La Huppe.

M. d'Eglantier joined them.

The Bishop led them into a room hung with violet silk; little marble angels, on each side of the door, held back the draperies. At the far end, an ample Regency console served as altar, and on its marble top stood an exquisite tabernacle of carved wood. The arm-chairs were of

the same period as the altar, deep, spacious, and upholstered in the violet of the hangings. The result was at once pompous and intimate.

"What a charming boudoir!" exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe, dropping into one of the armchairs. "And in perfect harmony with your episcopal gown. Ah, that lovely gown!"

"It's from Lanvin's," said the Bishop.

"A specialist?"

"Hmm . . . yes and no."

M. de La Huppe made a sign to his wife that it was growing late.

"Now, Monseigneur," she said, "show us your oratory."

"We are in it, Comtesse."

"Good Lord!" She lowered her voice: "And I was chattering about clothes."

She knelt down before a prie-Dieu, made a short prayer, and then, in the whisper one adopts in churches:

"The tabernacle is lovely."

"Yes," said the Bishop, "it is a fine piece of work, an eighteenth-century perfumery chest, signed by Martin."

"And the little angels!"

"They were cupids, Madame, but I baptized them, and now they are angels."

He lifted one hand, charged with absolution, towards heaven.

"They have many sins of curiosity to expiate," he continued. "Those chubby, innocent, little hands once held back the curtains in the alcove of Madame la Marquise de Pompadour."

"Ah," sighed Mme. de La Huppe, "they could hardly have been bored. . . . What a glorious period that was, Monseigneur!"

But it was time to tear themselves away from those delightful evocations and prepare for the trip home.

It was only after a long search that they found Molinoff and M. d'Eglantier's daughters. Eventually they were discovered in the pantry, where a cocktail contest had been organized. Molinoff was enthusiastically mixing vermouths, liqueurs, and spices, holding the shaker over his head, and pouring the contents into slender, green glasses. He had already served a half dozen rounds. Miss Grace Walker, Gerda Josefsen, and Lola Pasa-

dena carried their alcohol with unconcern. But Françoise, thinking it a game, plunged into the drinking without suspicion; she swallowed these amusing inventions at a single gulp. Presently the locks of hair that fluttered about her brows seemed to have become tongues of fire, and a strange, hot wind played on the back of her neck. Axel Hansen, seated beside her on the edge of the table, asked if she were not engaged.

"Not yet," she replied, her head drowned in happiness, "but soon."

Anne, meanwhile, was trying to find recruits, among these foreigners, for a group of allied members of the Action Française, of which Molinoff would be the president. The idea of founding a new club diverted them, and they began by discussing the colours of the tie they should adopt.

Unfortunately, they had not yet agreed on this point when it was time to leave.

The hospitable Bishop escorted his guests to their carriage and urged them to come again some Saturday soon: he would read them some super-realist prose, of the purest French beauty.

"And, if you will permit me, Monseigneur," replied Mme. de La Huppe, "I shall bring the *Yellow Book* of the Action Française and read you a few pages from it. There is no prose in the world whose beauty is more truly French."

On the way home, Molinoff proved brilliant and voluble. He had never talked so freely of himself before; he grew breathless on the subject.

"When I was at the Métropole, in Geneva . . ." he said.

He listed all of the famous people who had frequented that hotel: Sir Austen Chamberlain, Mme. Hélène Vacaresco, M. Albert Thomas ——

"Humph! . . ." said Mme. de La Huppe, at this last name.

Françoise drank his words, and their effect augmented that of the cocktails. She was ready to follow any man, who had kept such simplicity throughout such a brilliant life, to the end of the world.

"One evening," continued Molinoff, "I was strolling along the boulevards in Paris. The

weather was mild, I was dressed for the opera. . . ."

"You were dressed for the opera . . ." said Mme. de La Huppe. "Yes, and then?"

"And then . . . nothing," he concluded, noticing the expectancy on Françoise's face.

"Sometime you must tell me about that nothing," said Mme. de La Huppe, with a glance of secret understanding.

"Another day," began Molinoff, "as I was coming down Avenue Hoche, where I lived at the time . . ."

In the dusk that shrouded the distant slopes of Bourgueil, the future stretched before him in the same hue as the past: a flushed pink—the same pink that the present had assumed on Françoise's cheeks.

XV

From that day, he was seen no more at Beauchêne or Plessis-Puçay.

In the kitchen, Pia lived in dread of his haggard air and violent ways. At times, he ran to the library and locked himself in; stumbling down on the divan, he buried his head in the cushions, and stifled the name of Françoise in his tears.

"Why don't you want me for your wife, Signor Molinoff?" asked Pia, shielding her face from the blow that she feared.

"Why?" he roared. "Because I am a coward, do you hear, a coward."

During the next few weeks, he did not go off the grounds of Fontecreuse. He fell into the habit once more of giving his orders by telephone, and seldom left the kitchen, except to circle the pool in the garden, sighing as he walked. He devoted himself to perfecting new pastries, which

occupied his time and delighted Mme. Cortés. He grew brusque and silent, and behaved like an automaton. You would have thought that each of his movements was set off by a trigger.

Then, one afternoon, he harnessed up Buria, turned his back on Beauchêne, crossed the Loire, and drove to the villa of the Bishop of Mossamedes.

The period of farewell parties had set in: the final gaieties of a waning season. Molinoff was welcomed with joy and invited everywhere, by the young people and by their parents.

Henceforth, he was to be found at the Pasha's, at Lady Bridgewater's, or at Mr. and Mrs. Wilson's. Each day he crossed the Loire. Mme. Cortés was put off with an early lunch and a late dinner; he bought his provisions at Langeais, on his way through. His horse was soon down to its fetlocks.

Everyone liked him and he rapidly became indispensable. No one asked where he came from; he was admitted to the circle by virtue of his varied accomplishments and because he was still a novelty. At the close of a season, it is no longer

easy to invent diversions. Molinoff brought new ideas: it was autumn, he re-created the spring.

He organized a flower rally, laying out its course in Lady Bridgewater's park, which he strewed with chrysanthemums and asters, the last flowers of the season. Groves were transformed into labyrinths; the path was allowed to linger behind the gardener's lodge and become lost in thickets, so that the ladies might not be cheated of their moments of dalliance.

On another day he directed a mock cinema in the ruins of the château of Cinq-Mars. Señorita Pasadena was abducted by a troop of brigands, from whom Axel Hansen rescued her; and at one moment, the story seemed about to end in a betrothal.

All of these festivals, in fact, involved their share of amorous skirmishes. The day of the rally, Grace Walker, the young American, had waited for Molinoff at a turning of the path and held up her lips:

"Kiss me," she said.

He obeyed, with contempt for himself. The next day, Grace made no secret of the passion

he had inspired in her. She handed him her cloak to carry and left him to mind her dog; she whistled when she wanted him; she ordered him to lace her boots; in short, she loved him.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, Grace's uncle and aunt, welcomed Molinoff with that zest for all novelties that distinguishes Americans. Their niece's friend was accepted as one of the odd finds that Grace sometimes brought back from Tours in her runabout: battered kerosene lamps or statuettes of carved wood. His success in their eyes came chiefly because he kissed the ladies' hands and because he drove an antique carriage.

"A strange young man," said Mr. Wilson.

But Grace's passion for him was limitless, and soon became a monopoly. Each day, at three o'clock, Molinoff was expected to be at her orders. When he arrived, having swallowed his lunch on the way, she led him at once to her room. There she experimented with different ways of dressing her hair; it was his task to hold the mirror and to give advice, which she never followed. Or, stretched out on a chaise-longue, she commanded him to amuse her. He began an

imaginative account of his life in the palaces of Budapest and Geneva. But she interrupted him: she preferred to hear of those queer people she had seen with him at Monseigneur's tea.

"They were such quaint types," she said, "a sort of Louis Quinze effect."

Molinoff felt himself grow pale about the lips. In this room, where the furniture of the past was so ill at ease, it was distasteful to him to pronounce the names, d'Eglantier, La Huppe, and Servanes, names of an ancient resonance, polished and worm-eaten by time. He took refuge in evasion: he would deny them rather than betray them.

But he had not counted on the volatility of Grace's interest. Molinoff was not interested in antiques? Very well, she would play the gramophone. Wiener and Doucet, with their two pianos and their four hands, or Layton and Johnstone, with their caressing voices and the gentle melancholy of their negro songs, filtered into the room and charged it with their invisible and miraculous presence. Grace absorbed this music as if it had been a drug; she lay on her

chaise-longue, with eyes half-closed, abandoned to its influence. Then she spread out her arms, gave a low whistle, and waited for Molinoff to answer her call. But he did not stir.

Grace opened her eyes and met his wavering glance with a hard gaze:

"Stupid!" she said, "Come here, my darling, and kiss me."

This passion lasted five days.

On the sixth, Molinoff was detained at the Peña y Solars', where he had stopped on his way to the Wilsons', by Lola Pasadena. In her presence he forgot that Grace was expecting him, and with the same passivity, he surrendered to the whims of the little Peruvian. He submitted to her vows, her ardours, and her gusts of repentance. She hung about his neck and pleaded to be carried in his arms; she escaped from him and fled to the end of the garden, so that she might be pursued and crushed to his breast. She delighted in being overpowered, and only when she had been captured by force did she yield her lips and fine white teeth, trembling, weeping, and invoking the Virgin.

This game lasted a whole week.

Molinoff came to it like an invalid to his cure. Each day, after lunch, he might have been seen crossing the bridge at Langeais in his light carriage, driving at a fast trot. He left his orders as he went through the village, with a friendly word for the grocer and a smile for the butcher's girl.

But on his return his eyes were sombre and his lips drawn tight. Without a word he tossed his provisions into the carriage and set off. His back drooped and his hands lay limp on his lap as he drove. Crossing the bridge, at nightfall, he allowed Buria to stop; he gazed for a time at the softly flowing Loire, and sighed a name. . . . Then, flinging back his head, he snapped the whip viciously by Buria's nose and plunged into the forest at a gallop.

At Fontecreûse, Pia was waiting for him in the kitchen. The fire was lighted, the tiles scrubbed, the pans shining like a row of mirrors on the wall. The air smelled of ammonia water and peeled onions.

"Good evening, Signor Molinoff," said Pia

humbly. "Did you have a pleasant drive? Are you less sad now?"

She urged him frequently to make friends in the neighbouring châteaux. She had heard from the postman that M. le Comte Le Fort's valet was a sociable fellow. Then there was the porter at the Château d'Azay, who had been in the colonial troops and travelled widely; he had stories to tell of the Negroes in Africa and liked a good game of cards; in the afternoon, the signore might call on him. It would surely be more cheerful than driving about in the forest alone.

"No doubt," said Molinoff.

He took of his vest, still fragrant with Señorita Pasadena's jasmine, knotted a white apron about his waist, and untied the packages he had brought from Langeais.

In his heart, he longed to die.

XVI

At Beauchêne, his friends had become worried by M. de Molinoff's absence. Françoise was losing her colour. She remembered those bold black-eyed women she had seen laughing with him in Monseigneur's garden. She pictured every detail of their toilet, listened to the sound of their voices as they chattered with him in foreign tongues. And she soon discovered a new state of her heart: she was jealous. As you may see, there was little left now for Françoise to learn about love.

Anne was the victim of a different sorrow, which dated from her trip across the Loire. She had been forced to recognize the evidence: Monseigneur le Duc de Guyenne was little known on the right bank of that river that had been immortalized by his ancestors.

While she had imagined all of France in passionate dispute over the texts of Maurras, one

section of Touraine itself had been in conclave over the texts of Jean Cocteau. Even a Bishop, in his Louis XVIII villa, was indifferent to the quarrel between the Pope and the King. She resolved to speak to Molinoff of this, and entrust him with a mission of propaganda among the lukewarm.

M. d'Eglantier was delegated by his daughters to call at Fontecreuse for news. He obeyed, and was received by the gardener, Paolo.

"My good fellow," said M. d'Eglantier, "is your master in?"

"No, Monsieur, he is away."

"He is off on a trip, perhaps?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And do you know when he will be back?"

"As to that, I couldn't say. You had better ask my daughter; she might know."

He called to Pia, who appeared in the pantry door. M. d'Eglantier left the gardener mowing the lawn and crossed the terrace towards the house.

"Tell me, my girl, will M. de Molinoff be back soon?"

"He seldom comes home before six o'clock, Monsieur," said Pia sadly.

"Then he is not away on a trip?"

"Oh, no! He is probably driving in the forest somewhere. He spends all his time there."

"His health is not bad, I hope?"

"Ah, Monsieur, the trouble is not with his health. But he is melancholy, he refuses to see anyone. He needs some distraction. . . ."

"In that case, my child, tell M. de Molinoff that we should be happy to see him at Beauchêne."

"That is very good of you, Monsieur. And it's exactly what I was saying to him only yesterday: he should see people. What he needs most of all is to have a game of cards occasionally and to talk. . . ."

M. d'Eglantier was charmed by this ingenuous prattle.

"I see," he said, as he was leaving, "that you are very fond of M. de Molinoff."

"Oh! as to that . . ." said Pia, growing red.

When Molinoff came in at six o'clock, glower-

ing as usual, Pia greeted him by clapping her hands joyously:

"Signore, you are invited out!"

She told him that a very, very respectable old gentleman had inquired after him and invited him to his house, which was called Beauchêne, to play cards with him.

"But you must promise me," she added, shaking her finger at him archly, "that you will behave yourself with the girls."

"The girls?"

"Yes, of course. A man like that must have servants. He was a very, very respectable gentleman."

With the intensity of an addict, Molinoff resumed his daily trip to Langeais, in search of his drug.

But a fortnight later the Peña y Solars, with Lola in tears, left the banks of the Loire for Paris; the Wilsons returned to Baltimore.

Lady Bridgewater gave the final party of the season. Molinoff came early, insatiable in his frenzy of pleasure. As a man on the point of

bankruptcy squanders his last resources in banquets and gifts, Molinoff squandered his forced enthusiasm, which had been dwindling daily. It was a mad afternoon.

They began with tea, served on one of the islands in the Loire. Later they staged a shipwreck, and as that part of the river is dotted with islands, each of the men wished to take possession of one and found a kingdom. But this was impossible, for when they tried to assign the girls to their partners, each one insisted on being the Queen of the island where Molinoff was King.

Returning to the mainland, they fell back on the innocent games of their childhood, which provided an excellent pretext for the payment of forfeits; that is to say, of kisses. At first, the forfeits were evenly distributed. But as the afternoon waned, and the effects of the drug he had taken wore off, Molinoff, growing reckless and distracted, reaped forfeit after forfeit. He soon found himself condemned to kiss every girl among them. To an accompaniment of guffaws from the men and charitable encouragement from Lady Bridgewater, he embraced each of

these greedy dispensers of oblivion who had helped him, for a few weeks, not to despair of life.

When he started home in the tilbury, he was given a triumphal escort. Gerda Josefsen and Lady Bridgewater's nieces rode on the running board; Axel Hansen bombarded him with chrysanthemums; and a song was improvised in his honour. At the crossroads, where he turned into Langeais, they joined hands and danced about his carriage, the men singing flat, the girls with muted voices, closer to tears than to joy. Molinoff sat impassive, gazing through invisible clouds at the sky.

When the circle broke up, the song fell away and was followed by shouts of farewell: "See you in Paris!" they cried. "Don't forget to come to Cannes for New Years'! . . ."

He roused Buria to a trot and clattered off across the cobblestones of the village street.

XVII

The next day, he resumed his melancholy walk around the pool, lighting one cigarette after another and sighing, with the final puff of each: "Poor child . . . poor child. . . ."

It was the last week in October. Paolo was raking up the dead leaves and wheeling them to the kitchen garden. At the first frosts the begonias had withered and the dahlias drooped on their stems. Through this desolate setting Molinoff trailed his mood of defeat, sharing the death of nature, and drawing from it an inexhaustible nourishment for his own despair.

It was nearly noon when Pia, trembling and hopeful, discovered him in a corner of the park, where he had gone to nurse his grief undisturbed.

"There is mail for you, Signor Molinoff."

"Leave me alone."

"Perhaps they are more invitations."

She handed him four letters, which he snatched

from her hand so fiercely that she took fright and fled. He opened the first with a sneer. It was M. Cortés' weekly note:

I am well—wrote his employer—and the oysters here are excellent. They come from Marennes (France). Have ten dozen shipped by express for Madame.

I shall be home soon.

Sincerely,
CORTÉS

The second was from the Comtesse de La Huppe:

My dear Friend,

What has become of you? Such annoying things have happened since I saw you last! We have only a few days left before the Saint-Hubert hunt, and the curé at Puçay, acting on orders from the Archbishop, has refused to bless our pack, on the pretext that it is a part of the Action Française. But you may be sure our good dogs will not be scared off by that! Well? . . . We must persuade Monseigneur Posta de Silvo . . . de Silva . . . anyway, that Portuguese Bishop, who doesn't seem to be overly favourable to the Pope, to bless our pack on November third.

It should be easy to persuade him. Will you do that for us?

Wishing you success in this mission—and come to see me soon—

Yours,
LA PINOTIÈRE LA HUPPE

The third he did not open. He slipped it into his pocket, stifling a sob.

The fourth was from Anne d'Eglantier. As he opened the envelope, a sheaf of printed forms fell out, bearing the letter-head: *Allied Members of the Action Française of Touraine.*

Dear Allied Member,

There will be a meeting at Beauchêne, day after tomorrow, at five o'clock, to organize the "Allied Members of the Action Française of Touraine," of which you will surely be elected president. Do come, and send me a list of promising foreigners on the right bank. Perhaps your friend, M. Cortés, would like to be enrolled before he gets back from his trip. Send him one of these membership blanks to sign. My father tells me that your gardener—an Italian, he thinks—looked like a good honest fellow. Get him to join. We must act, act.

Come early. I want to tell you about a *very important* plan I have thought of.

Your friend in Action Française,

ANNE D'EGLANTIER, R. M. M.

Having read these letters, Molinoff retreated to the smoking-room, where he dispatched several glasses of brandy and stretched himself out on the divan.

Taking out the envelope he had stuffed into

his pocket, he ran his hand caressingly over the blue paper, lifted it to his eyes and examined the edges of the stamp for the little waves of mucilage that betray the contact of the tongue. Then he threw it suddenly from him, as though it had burned him.

Eventually, he read it:

I am very, very unhappy.
FRANÇOISE

"Coward!" he exclaimed, "You coward! you contemptible slave!"

He leaped up from the divan, drew on the white linen jacket and cook's bonnet he had worn when he first came to Fontecreuse, and, planting himself in front of the mirror, contemplated the effect. He seemed, in fact, to derive a bitter pleasure from the full realization of the spectacle he offered.

"Very well," he said, after a long pause, "I shall go to them and tell them the truth."

The next day, he set out once more for Beauchêne. He had put on the only suit that was his

own, a close-fitting black jacket, which he had inherited from the leader of the orchestra at the Métropole in Geneva. He who was in the habit of wearing the smartest ties in Touraine, knotted about his throat a mauve and pink rag of silk, which had been stolen by a page, in the same hotel, from a Lithuanian delegate to the League of Nations. He who for two months had worn only boots of London make, set out to call on M. d'Eglantier in the pumps of a Budapest dancer.

But, in his heart, he was discovering the beatitude of peace. He smiled on the trees along the road, stripped of their leaves and pale in the autumn light. He whistled gaily to the goldfinches that shimmered over the dark clumps and thistles in the fields.

He addressed his horse in tones of Franciscan humility:

"Buria," he said, "Burishka, O my innocent brother, yield me your place between the shafts. Let mine be the whip, the oats, and the stable. Servitude is my lot."

Lowliness had become sweet to him; he voiced

it in the croon of a lullaby; he made a canticle of his unworthiness:

"I shall tell them the truth."

"So there he is at last!" exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe when he appeared on the threshold of the bus. "But look at him! There is nothing of the woodsman about him."

"The woodsman?" echoed Molinoff.

"Deserter! Your servants told our dear friend, d'Eglantier, that you had abandoned us to roam in the woods."

Her swift glance encircled him with the precision of a lasso.

"And just as smart as ever! What a becoming coat—so sober! And that mauve tie! How exquisite it is!"

She turned to her husband:

"Armand, you should ask M. de Molinoff for the address of his tailor."

But Molinoff was looking apprehensively at Françoise, dreading the disillusionment he expected in her eyes. He found them easily enough: those two bits of sky, far from being over-

cast, had been illuminated with sudden joy.

"My dear neighbour," said M. d'Eglantier, "I have good news for you: the municipal council has at last approved a project for a main road through the forest, which will unite Beauchêne and Fontecreuse."

He beamed with satisfaction; he came towards Molinoff with outstretched hands, as if to receive a bouquet of compliments.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Molinoff, his throat contracting, "delighted."

Each one, after his long absence, had a piece of good news for him. The Comtesse Le Fort had found him the pearl of chambermaids, an industrious, virtuous girl, who would bring order into the confusion at Fontecreuse.

"Now," she said, "aren't you grateful?"

"I . . ." began Molinoff, "I have something to tell you all. . . ."

But M. de La Huppe took him by the arm.

"I am sure you will be glad to know," he said, "that we have arranged things very satisfactorily with the curé; the dogs are to be considered as having acted without conscious reason, and our

pack will be blessed. We shall have a Saint-Hubert hunt in the traditional style. I cannot tell you how gratified I am."

His features shone with relief from the fear of excommunication for his dogs.

"You will be with us, of course," he added, "on the third of November?"

"The third of November?"

Mme. de La Huppe outlined the program for Saint Hubert's day: at nine in the morning, mass in the château and the blessing of the hounds; at eleven, assembly at the Agnes Sorel crossroads in the forest of Chinon.

"But," began Molinoff, feeling his resolution slipping from him, "I have something to tell you. . . ."

"Yes? . . ."

"I can't . . ."

"You can't come? But we are counting on you! And here is a young lady who could not be consoled if you failed us."

Anne had come up to them.

"My dear allied member, may I have two words with you?"

She led Molinoff from the bus into the library.

"I am in ecstasy," she said. "My idea of the A. M. T. has been approved by Maurras. . . ."

"The A. M. T.?"

"Yes, the Allied Members of Touraine. Maurras is waiting for you in Paris. You must go see him at once. It will mean the presidency for you without any doubt."

"But . . . I wanted to tell you. . . ."

"Nonsense. You mustn't evade a post of honour. Besides . . ."

She glanced towards the door of the bus and the windows that opened on the terrace.

". . . besides," she went on in a grave voice, "I am so happy over this good fortune that has come to you."

". . . that has come to me?" said Molinoff, closing his eyes.

Thus, having come to make a humiliating avowal, he found himself chosen by each of his friends as the confidant of a special joy.

"Ah," sighed Anne, "I wish I could say: that has come to us."

But this was too much for Anne's natu-

ral reserve; she became confused and blushed.

"She too," thought Molinoff, "she too . . ."

He gazed at her intent features, quickened with a new grace by her embarrassment, and his courage left him. Neither the reserve with which he met his friends' confidences, nor his threadbare clothes, nor even the anguish of his heart, could dissipate this happiness that his presence seemed to evoke on all sides. He had only to cross the threshold of the house for his hosts to be showered with good fortune: the La Huppes received the blessing of the great Saint Hubert on their dogs; M. d'Eglantier was awarded a pleasure drive by a socialistic municipal council; Charles Maurras himself, by this chain of miraculous circumstances, found his shock troops swelled by the unexpected organization of a Foreign Legion in the Action Française.

"Come along, you conspirators," said Françoise, appearing in the door of the library, "we are waiting tea for you."

Anne and Molinoff followed her into the bus.

Never had there been a gayer party, nor a girl more tremulously happy than Françoise. In vain

Molinoff tried to avoid her; she devoted herself to his needs. She mixed him a whisky and soda, ignoring the protests of the Comtesse Le Fort, who sputtered that they were trying to kill her dear Ivan. When he was at last settled, with his glass in his hand, Françoise curled herself on a stool at his feet.

"If you only knew," she told him, "how bored we were while you were away. The cards stayed shut up in the drawer and grass was beginning to sprout on the tennis court."

"Alas," thought Molinoff, "how can I ever tell them the truth?"

Once more, the spell of this domestic setting began to spread over him:

"May I have another whisky?" he asked.

"Ivan, please!" begged the Comtesse Le Fort.

"What difference does it make?" he sighed.

Having refilled his glass, Françoise continued:

"The hunting is going to begin soon, and that is the most wonderful season of the year. We shan't let you desert us again for days and days. Every Wednesday and Saturday we will go hunt-

ing in the forest of Chinon. Oh, the winter is marvellous! . . ."

She lifted her eyes towards his face and, with a glance that she knew he would understand:

"Everyone is happy now," she said.

"No," he answered, shaking his head gently.

"Oh? Who is there here that is not happy?"

She glanced about the circle, but found only smiling faces. Then:

"I know," she said, "you mean poor Mme. Le Fort, on account of your whisky."

And, indeed, the Comtesse Le Fort could be heard, in the next room, appeasing her grief with the lament of Orpheus, which she sang to her own accompaniment.

"Would you like another glass?" asked Françoise laughingly.

"If you please," said Molinoff, who despaired now of being able to keep his vow.

So long as he refused her nothing, Françoise was happy; never had happiness seemed to her so easy to attain. Nor had she ever conferred it on another so opportunely. Once more, the miracle of her presence, as well as the effects of

the liquor, wafted Molinoff from reality into his dream.

From that moment, his enchantment became contagious; all fell in with the enthusiasm that M. de Molinoff's return had engendered. M. d'Eglantier organized a game of bridge; those who were not playing gathered in a circle for conversation. And through the Comtesse Le Fort, Glück spread over them all the tender beseeching of the husband of Eurydice: *Let my tears speak to your heart.*

The conversation turned naturally on the coming hunt.

"Will you ride Buria?" asked Françoise. "She must be a good jumper."

"Yes," replied Molinoff, "I have often ridden her. She was one of the finest jumpers in Russia."

The Comte Le Fort recalled that, in the past, the death had several times been staged in the park at Fontecreuse itself.

"Let us hope that this will happen again," he added. "It would be a fitting end to M. de Molinoff's first hunt in our neighbourhood."

Mme. de La Huppe boasted that she was indefatigable in the pursuit of the stag; as well as in that of any other aim, she added, gazing directly into the young Russian's eyes, that she had once given herself.

Anne and Françoise had nothing to say of past hunts, so eagerly were they awaiting the coming one.

And Molinoff, who recalled winding a horn at Vienna and at Neuilly, in circumstances best left undescribed, transferred his blasts to imaginary hunts. This inner music restored him to himself. He evoked the memories of a life he would have loved to have had and had not had; he told tales that left Françoise radiant with pride and trembling at risks he had not run.

He was weaving a past over the exquisite uncertainties of the present.

XVIII

When he received the card inviting him to take part in the inaugural hunt at Puçay, he was seized with an intoxication that promptly made itself felt in the kitchen. He baked a symbolic cake, decorated with the properties of the hunt, the forest, and love. Mme. Cortés suffered indigestion from hunting horns of barley sugar, thickets of angelica, and hearts of whipped cream; but she made no complaint, for she delighted in eating beyond her capacity, great as it was.

As soon as lunch had been served, Molinoff hurried to the station and caught the train to Tours, where he sold the medallion of his great-grandmother, in its frame of pearls. Then, at the best tailor's in the Rue Nationale, he ordered a pink coat and white breeches; at the hatter's, a black velvet cap; all to be ready within the week. The tradesmen promised whatever he

asked. The saddler got out his best saddle for the Comte de La Huppe's guest; it proved less easy to find a hunting horn; but, by the united efforts of the bootmaker, the tailor, and the hatter, one was at length discovered.

A week later, the Comte de La Huppe and his guests, gathered at the Agnes Sorel cross-roads, were awaiting the signal to release the hounds. A few of the elect wore the badge of the hunting-club on an almond green coat with pink facings; these were the Comte Le Fort, the Marquis de Servanes, and a sprinkling of old huntsmen from the neighbourhood, with wind-tanned faces and short, stiff brushes of hair. Anne and Françoise, chaperoned by Mme. de La Huppe, sat gracefully erect in the saddle, their flushed cheeks glowing under their round black riding hoods, holding in their restive horses with small determined hands. M. de Molinoff had not arrived.

In spite of their reluctance to start without him, the hunt could be delayed no longer. Mme. de La Huppe made the pretext that her girth

was not tight, and dismounted; her husband called back that he could not stay to help her mount again. "Jean"—that was her servant—"will help me," she answered. But she was counting on Molinoff.

After the first few moments' trot, Françoise d'Eglantier lost her way in the familiar forest and, by a curious blunder in orientation, soon found herself back at the Agnes Sorel crossroads. Almost immediately afterwards Anne appeared, obviously disconcerted at not being alone.

From the nearby woods they heard the horns sound the view halloo.

"Let's catch up with them," said Françoise, "they are headed towards Lavrons."

"You go ahead. I'll follow you."

"Yes, go ahead, girls," added Mme. de La Huppe. "I'll be with you in a moment."

"Oh! we wouldn't leave you alone, Aunty."

You would have thought there was no exit from that crossroads. None of the three wished to be the first to set out; and, listening in the direction of the road from Azay, by which one

would come from Fontecreuse, each clung to the hope of rejoining the hunt in the company of M. de Molinoff.

Meanwhile, having made a dozen detours in his tilbury, Molinoff had reached the abandoned farm of the Wolf That Was Hanged, on the Ruchard moors, near the edge of the forest. This was a desolate ruin, overgrown with brush and thistle. Against the wan November sky, pitted with crows, a fragment of wall stood out in the form of a gallows, where one felt that more than a wolf might have been hanged: this was all that was left of the main gate, which had once given admission to the courtyard.

Molinoff crossed this ominous threshold with a smile: he was used to poverty-stricken settings. Releasing Buria from the shafts and unbuckling the harness, he saddled her with the best saddle in Tours.

Then, from the space beneath the driver's seat, he drew out a pair of boots, a large mirror, and two cardboard boxes.

In the room that he chose as his dressing-room,

a layer of owl droppings on the floor assured him of privacy. Safe from the curiosity of Pia and Sister Encarnación, he once more gave himself up to the quiet enjoyment of feeling at home. He hung the mirror on a rusty nail sticking out from the wall, lit a cigarette, and whistled a hunting song. When he had stepped into his breeches—after spreading a sheet of brown paper on the floor—and pulled on his boots, whose dark polish lit up the room, he knew that the universe was his.

He laughed and talked at the same time; knoting his tie before the mirror, he nodded approvingly and said: "A fine young man, Ivan. . . . By God, you're a splendid fellow!"

But when he unfolded the pink coat, his satisfaction became complete; he gazed at it, held it up like a knight taking vows on his sword, and thought: "Today is the justification of my life." Trampling the owl droppings with his gleaming boots, he drunkenly pictured a future that was to last until sundown.

Although accustomed to bury his joys and griefs in his own breast, today he could not main-

tain this self-taught restraint: his happiness demanded the appeasement of words.

When he swung into the saddle, Buria's ears twitched with surprise at this novel burden and her hind parts rose tentatively to shake it off. Then she broke into open revolt: she leaped vertically into the air and came down rigid as iron; she flung herself to one side and then to another, terrified by the strange grip on her flanks. But Molinoff called her by name and patted her trembling neck; galloped her across the field, taking her over several ditches and a low wall; and soon gave her to understand, by the firmness of his touch, that revolt was futile. When his mastery had been acknowledged, he set off at a trot for the scene of the hunt.

Luck, which was with him that day, brought him into the forest just as the stag, followed at a distance by the hounds, came into the open near the Lavrons quarry.

Molinoff raised the horn to his lips and blew a clear, ringing call, with the modulations he had learned in the fair at Neuilly. The frightened stag swerved and disappeared into the covert on

the right; Molinoff plunged in behind him.

But the dogs, thrown off by this sudden manœuvre, swept by towards the plain, baying lustily and carrying with them, in their mistake, the Master of the Hounds and several others. The almond-green coats scattered over the heath; the expanse of open country drew them on with that lure of errors in which one persists. Excited by the dogs, each one imagined that he sighted the stag; the Comte de La Huppe was already anticipating a finish in the waters of the Manse.

Meanwhile, Molinoff was filling the alleys of the forest with valiant blasts on his horn.

Mme. de La Huppe heard him. Having brought her horse to a walk, she was riding alone through the forest, aloof from the enthusiasm of the others, brooding over her unused beauty.

Perhaps because her heart guided her, or perhaps because her self-imposed solitude was beginning to bore her, she responded to the challenge of the horn, like a hind drawn by the belling of its stag. Bringing her crop down, with all of her pent-up energy, on the rump of her horse, she guided him towards the floating call, her head

cocked forward to listen, her eyes impatiently sweeping the undergrowth. . . . At the end of a corridor of trees, she caught sight of Molinoff: her matronly breast shook with sudden tumult.

"You? . . ."

Words crowded and tumbled over her lips, her volubility concealing the intensity of her embarrassment. Where had he come from? Did he know that they had waited for him? How handsome he looked! What elegant boots! And what an arch! Ah, his foot testified to his breeding. . . . What had become of the hunt? Where were the others? And the stag? What an exquisite crop! And held by a hand so . . . Ah, that hand. . . ."

It was more than she could bear. The solitude of the forest, the trees that enclosed them like the curtains of an alcove, the moss that lay inviting, like a bed. . . . She reined her horse beside Molinoff's, leaned recklessly from the saddle, and flinging one arm about his neck, reached for his lips with hers.

"Ivan . . ." she sighed, "shall we dismount? . . ."

Molinoff trembled, for the danger was imminent: Mme. de La Huppe seemed about to swoon.

He raised the horn quickly to his lips and blew, to announce that the stag had changed its course; then, whirling his horse about, he retreated down the alley at a gallop.

"You child!" she screamed. "What are you doing?"

Never, since Roland fell at Roncevaux, had trumpet sounded a more despairing appeal. On the plain, where the hunt had strayed, everyone heard it; M. de La Huppe the first. The dogs circled back in answer and the huntsmen followed. But, to their surprise, they found only Mme. de La Huppe.

"Did you see something?" asked her husband.

"To tell the truth," she said, "I just caught sight of it."

"Another head, perhaps?"

The honour of the hunt was at stake; it was the animal that had been started that must be found, and not another.

"The head *was* young," said Mme. de La Huppe.

She burst into laughter, which the others considered inappropriate at such a serious crisis. It was her way of announcing that the stag had changed its course.

The day was beginning badly. These uncertain calls, this invisible stag that was sighted everywhere, gave the hunt an atmosphere of mystery, in which the Comte de La Huppe's positive mind was at a loss.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are stumped."

He proposed a council. M. de Servanes was in favour of giving up the hunt, and his old horse obviously agreed with him.

"So soon?" exclaimed Françoise.

But the leader of the whippers-in was determined to save the honour of the Puçay hunt; he offered to bring back the hounds and put them on the scent.

Some argued that the track had been doubled; others that the scent was too faint and that the dogs would lose it again; others that they might beat about until evening, and that they had better sound the retreat.

The hunt was on the point of breaking up.

At this moment, Molinoff emerged, at a ringing gallop, from one of the alleys of trees, and brought harmony by the tone of authority that he assumed at once. He bowed to the ladies, and shook hands with the men. In a few words, he cleared up the situation. The whippers-in, with his directions, had no difficulty in finding the trail; the hounds gave voice and were off. The hunt that all had been ready to abandon a moment before was taken up again with enthusiasm. Everyone felt that M. de Molinoff had the stuff of a Master of the Hunt in him; the Comte de La Huppe's button lost much of its lustre in their eyes.

Anne and Françoise ostentatiously took instructions only from the newcomer. They galloped on each side of him, pressing him with questions. He replied in terms that, although hardly technical, were none the less clear. He oriented himself by the baying of the hounds and, not knowing a path in the forest, acted as guide to all the rest.

From then on, the hunt became almost an enchantment, and you would have thought that

the stag was in secret agreement with the enchanter: he traced his fatal path through the loveliest groves of the forest, doubling in the heather, disappearing to give his pursuers respite, and appearing again unexpectedly.

Françoise was no longer riding on this earth; mounted on a winged horse, she flew by the side of a demi-god.

After four hours of a chase that was more like an afternoon's ride, the exhausted stag reached the outskirts of Fontecreuse.

Molinoff, who was not familiar with the limits of the property, realized suddenly that he was galloping across the lawn of the park.

"My dear friend," said the Comte de La Huppe, riding up beside him, "we are going to see the finish in the pool at Fontecreuse. That has never happened before; I shall send an account of it tomorrow to the *Figaro*."

A moment later the stag plunged into the oval pool. The hounds, splashing and snorting, followed him and surrounded him, yelping for his death as he fought them off with his last spurts of strength. Then the horns sounded, announcing

the finish: a stirring music. Molinoff was not the least ardent in blowing. He grew drunk on his own blasts; he was sounding the death of his misfortunes. Submitting to his prestige, the Master of the Hunt yielded him the honour of finishing the stag.

Paolo had come running to the scene, followed by Pia. Seeing Molinoff so splendidly dressed, and deferred to by the whippers-in, who waited, cap in hand, for orders, he uncovered and asked if the Signore had need of him.

"Untie the skiff," said Molinoff.

It had already begun to grow dark. In the trembling dusk, a new Lohengrin, in pink coat and white breeches, was oared magically across the water, while each of the ladies, in the inner chambers of her heart, pictured herself as the chosen Elsa.

"My poor boy!" moaned the Comtesse Le Fort, "I hope the stag doesn't fight."

But Françoise was hoping for a struggle, from which her knight would emerge victorious.

"Ah!" cried one of the whippers-in, "M. le Comte can give us all pointers."

It was no more than the truth.

As the skiff neared the stag, a sort of fascination held the animal motionless. Molinoff leaned over the side, raised his knife, and drove it into the stag's heart; the magnificent head drooped towards the reddened water.

The horns pealed out the news.

"Even in the royal hunts," murmured Mme. de La Huppe, "there will be nobody to equal him."

In her admiration, she would have offered her heart to the hero's knife.

At that moment, one might have seen the curtains in a window on the second story of the château drawn aside, and the terrified face of a nun, framed in its hood, pressed against the pane; but there was none to notice it, for all eyes were on M. de Molinoff.

The Comte de La Huppe suggested that the stag be cleaned in the courtyard of the château.

"By all means!" cried Molinoff.

And turning to Paolo:

"Bring us some torches! Three dozen pine faggots!"

By now, the rest had dismounted. In the purplish dusk of the autumn evening, all felt at peace, lulled by the sense of a duty accomplished: a dangerous animal put to death.

Presently, fresh blasts on the horns announced that the carcass was being cleaned. Gusts of smoke and flame, swirling up from the semicircle of torches, streaked the black sky. The howling and scuffling of the dogs, held back from the carcass, the cracking of whips, and the shouting of the men, quickened the blood with that beat of exultation that is characteristic of this elegant ceremony. Every one shared in the healthy, primitive satisfaction; only Mme. de La Huppe, pressed against Molinoff's side, found the glow of the torches disconcertingly bright.

Françoise, lighted by their flicker, scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper. Then, slipping across the terrace to the château, she felt her way into the library, where, trembling and groping with both hands, she left the paper on the table.

Meanwhile the hounds had bolted the entrails in two gleams of their yellow teeth, and were guzzling the blood of their victim.

One after another, the torches sputtered out. Retreat was sounded, ringing cruelly in many a reluctant ear that evening. Only with the greatest difficulty was Mme. de La Huppe lifted to her saddle, protesting that she was at the end of her strength. Anne stirred up the embers with the butt of her crop; Françoise, still trembling from the exploit she had just carried out, was living over the delights of the day in her memory and already anticipating the happiness she expected from the morrow.

When the tattoo of the last horse, disappearing down the road, had dwindled into the night, Molinoff remained alone at the gate and, lifting the horn to his lips, blew a low elegy, laden with melancholy, as a farewell to the pleasures of the day. The notes melted into each other, releasing their appeal to the indifferent stars, falling back like a sigh, without echo.

Ten times he sent out his lament to the shadows and the empty road, repeating it with modulations, and varying the nuances of his mood; it was a language in itself. Tears, rolling

from his eyes, dropped on his beautiful pink coat.

Suddenly the rasp of a klaxon extinguished his clear notes; two headlights, springing out of the forest, lit up the polish of his boots and the brass of his horn. He flattened himself against the granite pillar of the entrance, while a limousine flashed by him and came to a stop, with a squealing of brakes, before the château of Fontecreuse.

A moment later, a furious voice echoed through the courtyard, spattering curses in Spanish and questions in French.

"What sort of a performance is this, Molinoff? Are you mad, for God's sake? . . ."

M. Cortés leaped from his motor, stepped into a bed of hot embers, cursed again, and fell upon Molinoff, whom he seized by the buttons of his pink coat and shook fiercely.

"What's the meaning of all this, do you hear, what's the meaning of all this? Playing the fine gentleman, eh? While my house burns down. . . . Where is Madame? Where is Sister Encarnación? . . . You're through here, do you understand?" M. Cortés seemed about to burst in his anger. "You're through!"

Followed by the chauffeur, who had detached the fire-extinguisher from the motor, he ran towards the château and, calling on all the saints for aid, bounded up the stairs, two at a time, to his wife's apartment.

He found Mme. Cortés unconscious, the nun kneeling over her, fanning her with one hand and telling her rosary with the other. The parrot was screaming hunting calls and choking in the attempt to howl like a dog.

"Juanita!" cried M. Cortés, "*cara, cara* Juanita! They have killed you, my pet, my little Juanita! . . ."

He sobbed, he called for help, he appealed to heaven.

Molinoff tiptoed into the library and locked the door.

XIX

The next morning was one of those golden days that come early in November; a time when larks sing and the air is soft.

Molinoff took the path through the woods, his bag in his hand. It was a cardboard bag, unsuccessfully imitating crocodile skin, and not heavy, for he had taken only what belonged to him: Princess Paley, Denikin, the Tsarevich, two clean shirts, a package of cigarettes, and a great deal of empty space around all of this.

In his pocket he carried a handkerchief embroidered with forget-me-nots. Once inside the woods, he paused and unfolded it; inside was Françoise's latest note:

> I shall look for you tomorrow evening at half past six at the tennis gate.
>
> FRANÇOISE

He smiled, raised the paper to his lips, and continued on his way.

For several hours, while the sun was climbing, Molinoff tramped through undergrowth, avoiding the roads and beaten paths. He walked in circles, walking for the sake of walking, like an escaped prisoner, fearful of what lies behind him. But he was never far from the wall of Beauchêne.

Towards noon, as his legs were growing weary and he had nothing to eat, he stretched out at the foot of a beech, set his watch on the ground beside him, and opened the package of cigarettes. Soon he fell into a dreamless sleep, his head on his bag, and did not wake until it was dark.

At half past six, the gate in the wall creaked and a white figure was silhouetted in the obscurity.

A voice that trembled slightly asked:

"Are you there?"

Molinoff, leaving his bag under the tree, stepped out into the road. Françoise ran to meet him.

"You really came? Oh, I am so happy! Give me your hand—and don't talk too loud. . . . I

don't know how to tell you. . . . My heart is beating so. . . ."

She had caught Molinoff's hand and pressed it between hers.

"We mustn't stay here," she whispered. "Come inside."

She led him to the summer-house by the tennis court; a rustic pavillion, capped with a thatched roof; on the inside, a bench ran around the wall. She was still clinging to his hand when they sat down.

"I ought not to be here," he said in a grave voice.

"I am the one who ought not. . . . But I am here just the same and I am so happy! . . ."

She dropped her cheek against Molinoff's shoulder. The sweet warmth of her touch flowed into him, stirring his blood. In the depth of his distress, he yielded to this moment of exquisite anodyne, as one in pain yields to morphine.

"Tomorrow," he thought, "tomorrow I will tell her. . . ."

Rejected by the world, without food and without a roof for the night, he prayed for a

respite, as a condemned man pleads with the executioner.

"Ah," he murmured, in a final effort at sincerity. "If you knew who I am. . . ."

Her little laugh was light as a caress.

"Who you are, Ivan? Oh, I know, I know perfectly. You are the one I have waited for."

She pressed against him more tenderly.

"And now that you are here, and I see you, and hear you, I know it is you, it is really you. . . ."

A restless, autumn wind swayed the trees over their heads. Through the leafless branches, the stars flickered and vanished, like lanterns of a distant lawn-party.

"Tomorrow," thought Molinoff, "tomorrow . . . not today."

"But what you couldn't ever have guessed," continued Françoise, "is that I thought about you long before you came."

The language of love, like the song of the nightingale, admits of no innovations. It repeats its three phrases; they are always the same and they are the only ones that count.

"I knew that you would have blue eyes and black hair. And, of course, I knew that you would be gay and charming; that everybody would like you; and that you would succeed in everything, as you did the other day with the Duchesse de Guyenne, or yesterday in the hunt. Oh! I recognized you at once, the day you picked up the tennis ball."

"But perhaps it was not I."

"Yes, it was you. It was the very picture of the happiness I had waited for."

The call of an owl rippled through the dusk, answered by another from the forest. In the slumbering park, many living creatures were keeping watch, sending out their calls, through the darkness, to each other. To live is to find one's mate: all of life is a rendezvous.

"You know," said Françoise timidly, "papa is very fond of you. He was talking to me about you this morning. . . ."

But this was more than Molinoff could bear. The tears crowded into his eyes, and his throat tightened as he held back a sob. He gave a deep sigh.

"Why did you sigh?" asked Françoise. "Are you sad?"

"Sad? No. . . . Could one be sad when happiness is so near?"

"Ivan. . . ."

Translucent under the stars, like the mask of a spirit, her clear face was lifted to his, and in a changed voice she murmured:

"Kiss me."

Taking her gently by her frail shoulders, Molinoff drew this heart, which offered itself, against his own, and rested his cheek on her cheek.

"Farewell," he murmured to himself.

"Ivan," she sighed.

She clung to him as if in terror that he might vanish. And thus they sat, without speaking, for some time. Françoise, a prey to the exquisite fire of love, was allowing herself to be consumed.

"Suppose I should leave France?" said Molinoff presently. "Suppose I had to go away?"

Françoise grasped his wrists and gazed at him:

"I would follow you," she said, "to the end of the world."

". . . to the end of the world?"

"Even farther than that."

"But farther would be hell, perhaps."

"Oh! With you hell would still be paradise."

"You would really follow me?"

She smiled, unable to imagine that he could doubt it.

"Of course."

At that moment, the dinner gong rumbled in the château of Beauchêne. Molinoff started.

"That is the first bell," said Françoise. "I must go."

"Not yet," he begged.

But she had already risen.

"I must hurry. We are not yet . . ." She hesitated and then, with a confused laugh: ". . . formally engaged."

Through the tears that insisted on blurring his eyes, Molinoff tried to read her face in the pale luminance of the stars. He had run his fingers through her hair and was impressing the memory of her head on his palm: the lines, the modelling, the dear warmth.

"Françoise," he moaned, "Françoise . . ."

"Tomorrow," she said.

"Tomorrow," he thought, "when she will know. . . ."

"But where?" she asked.

"Where?"

Her words of a few moments ago were still spinning in his head: "To the end of the world . . . in hell. . . ." Perhaps, then, this was not the end. "Do you know that old farm, the Wolf That Was Hanged? . . . Could you meet me there tomorrow? . . . Come early, Françoise . . . at three o'clock."

"At the Wolf That Was Hanged? That old ruin on the moors? . . . That is just like my darling Ivan! You will see me at three o'clock; I shall come on my bicycle. And no one will bother us there."

They groped their way out of the summer-house; at the far end of the path, between two rows of bare bushes, glittered the lights of the house.

Françoise had pressed herself once more against him, when the library door opened and a silhouette blotted the luminous rectangle. A voice called:

"Françoise!"

"That is Anne," said Françoise. "Why do you suppose she is calling me?"

She took Molinoff's face tenderly between her hands.

"I must tell you one thing more," she said.

Then, in a whisper:

"I love you."

"Ah! . . ." sighed Molinoff.

Anne was calling again, in an excited, insistent voice.

"Here I am!" replied Françoise. "I am coming."

For the last time, she slipped her hand into Molinoff's.

"Tomorrow, Ivan."

"Tomorrow, Françoise."

She skipped down the path. But Anne was already running impatiently towards her.

Molinoff crouched behind a bush.

"Françoise!" said Anne, as soon as she thought that her sister could hear her, "Françoise, if you only knew what we have just learned. . . ."

"What is it?" asked Françoise lightly.

"Come here quick! . . . Listen. . . . Just imagine. . . ."

The rest of her words were absorbed by the darkness.

XX

"Well!" exclaimed Mme. de La Huppe, as she swept into the bus, "wasn't I a thousand times right?"

She dropped into an arm-chair, fanning herself with her glove, sliding one finger under her collar, and gasping for air. The thousand times that she had been right crowded simultaneously to her tongue and choked her. They passed her lips in shreds.

". . . we heard about it last night—you did, too?—I always smelled the adventurer in that young man—many a time I had to defend myself against his advances! . . . They are all alike, these foreigners. Our poor France! Ah, Daudet knows what he is talking about. . . ."

Then, turning towards Anne, who was beating a nervous tattoo on the window-pane:

"You've got us into a nice fix, my child, with this business of Allied Members."

The bus was in turmoil. Lunch had hardly been finished, before Beauchêne had been invaded by the Le Forts, the La Huppes, and the Marquis de Servanes, gathering to thresh out the news in the house nearest to Fontecreuse, and most conspicuous in the scandal.

"You'll have to admit," said the Comte de La Huppe, glancing about the circle, "that you were well fooled, all of you."

His chest swelled and he strutted the length of the bus as he boasted of the suspicion he had always felt for the Russian. It had been enough for him to take one look at the young dandy's familiar airs with Madame la Duchesse de Guyenne. He could spot that tribe. . . .

"And on top of that," he added, "the bounder murdered our Saint Hubert stag. Traditionally, the hunt should have no result. It was not the business of a guest to find the stag."

"Well spoken, La Huppe," said the Comte Le Fort, who was always loyal to traditions.

The Comtesse Le Fort was broken with grief: she had staked all her affection on Molinoff, and this was how he had rewarded her.

"A cook," she moaned, "Ivan, a cook!"

"You were looking for a cook, weren't you?" suggested the Comte de La Huppe maliciously. "Why don't you hire him?"

He seemed to forget his own part in the situation by tweaking the memories of the others.

"After all, Servanes," he added, "you were the one who introduced him to us, when you knew nothing about him and had made no attempt to look him up. That was rather naïve of you, my friend."

The old Marquis was pacing the room, his hands behind his back, nodding his head, and mentally reviewing the laws governing the etiquette of introductions.

"True," he admitted. "But I did not take it on myself to present him to Mme. la Duchesse de Guyenne."

That was cruel!

Seated on a low bench in one corner of the room, her eyes fixed on the clock on the mantelpiece, Françoise had made little pretence of listening to the dispute. The reproaches that flashed back and forth left her unmoved; at the

most, an imperceptible film clouded her glance as Molinoff's name passed and repassed, like a shuttle, through the conversation. But, when half past two struck, she rose abruptly and started towards the door.

"Don't go, Françoise," said Mme. de La Huppe, "I have something to say to you."

Françoise remained standing.

"Personally," continued Mme. de La Huppe, "I believe that he is an agent of that demon of the Vatican, Gasparri: no foreigner would insist on joining our party, as he did, except for reasons of espionage."

"Do you really think that, Aunty?" said Anne, terrified. "And I gave him paper with out letter-head on it!"

"That was a fine thing to do! It's blunders like that, my child, that get people guillotined."

M. d'Eglantier admitted that his daughter had not been as prudent as she might have been; but, after all, it was quite possible that Molinoff was a genuine Molinoff; for the ups and downs of the Russian Revolution—at least, so he had heard—had forced many noble émigrés to accept menial

tasks; and, in any case, he could not forget that this young man had always behaved like a gentleman.

"Tut, tut, tut," said Mme. de La Huppe, "I have never seen him behave in any way except like a servant, and an impudent one at that. Besides, what proof have you that his name actually is Molinoff?"

Françoise had tiptoed as far as the door.

"Where are you going?" asked her sister.

"Just to get a breath of air in the park."

"In this wind?"

But Mme. de La Huppe detained her:

"Tell me, my child, did this . . . this person ever . . . how shall I say it? . . . ever say anything about marriage to you?"

"No, Aunty."

"He never asked how much your dowry was?"

"He? Oh, Aunty!"

At that moment, three o'clock struck. Françoise pushed open the door with her foot and disappeared.

She crept silently up the stairs to her room. There she fished a small travelling bag out of

the bottom of her wardrobe, opened it in the centre of the floor, and tossed her toilet articles and a handful of linen into it. She walked in a dream, turning in circles and tapping the floor with her feet, her eyes vacant before the things she needed, but eagerly scanning the room for any precious trifles that recalled the happy moments of her childhood. She took no handkerchiefs, nor even the tiniest mirror, but she pressed the statuette of her guardian angel against her heart, and slipped it into the bag.

"Hurry," she told herself, "hurry. . . ."

When she considered that she had sufficient baggage for the journey of life, she gave a final glance at her maiden's bed and, slipping down the back stairs, reached the storeroom where her bicycle was kept. She tied the bag on the handlebars with bits of string and a leather strap, mounted, and, crossing the courtyard as swiftly as possible, escaped unseen through the garden gate.

From Beauchêne to the Wolf That Was Hanged is a long trip through the forest; the roads are rutted by loggers' carts and, in some

places, washed away by streams, forcing one into wide detours through the thickets. Françoise found it hard going from the start.

The wind of the night before, which had turned colder and gustier, drove her breath back into her throat and sent swirls of dead leaves into the wheels and against her ankles. She pedalled doggedly, her teeth clenched, her head thrust forward, watching out for holes, bumps, and stones.

It was the first time she had been deep in the forest alone. Her heart fluttered, but neither her fear, nor the strain in her legs, nor the lash of the wind, could stop her: she was hastening with all her heart to the help of her love.

"Oh, my poor Ivan," she whispered. "I must hurry, hurry. . . ."

She must place her hand once more in his—she should not have taken it away the evening before; she must say to him: "Do not be ashamed, I love you." She pictured him, under this grey sky, whipped by the wind, watching for her, perhaps giving up hope. "But he knows that I love him. He cannot doubt me."

She drove the bicycle up one low hill after another, her lips parted, her breath coming fast, her numbed fingers clutching the handle-bars. She longed to cry out: "I am coming . . . here I am! I am coming! . . ." Each downward stroke of the pedal she sent as a message of encouragement. Halfway up the rise in the road, at King's Oak, she was forced to stop; her heart was jumping in her throat and behind her eyes; the blood roared in her ears like a cascade. She sat down on the moss.

"Ivan and I alone," she thought, "will be stronger than the rest of them together."

Her eye fell on the wrist-watch she was wearing.

"Four o'clock! Oh! . . . Quick. . . ."

But when she tried to start again, her bicycle seemed glued to the ground. The effort of her legs was in vain; her ankles no longer commanded the obedience of the pedals. She climbed stiffly to the ground.

She could hardly stand now; her legs felt as though they had been broken and were about to crumble beneath her. She pushed the bicycle,

first by the handle-bars and then by the saddle. Every dozen yards or so, she paused, and let her head droop forward on the handle-bars.

She longed to sink down on the ground, to let her tears flow without restraint, to drift into oblivion. Her mind was already too numbed to think.

On reaching the Ruchard moors, she found a good road, and a shred of strength came back to her. She climbed on the bicycle, but the wind pinned her skirt against her legs and shook her like a clumsy giant. On this vast heath, the storm was in its element. "You shan't stop me," said Françoise through her teeth. "You shan't!" She crouched over the handle-bars, her elbows pressed against her ribs. But her defiance was the recklessness of despair: a moment later a gust of wind struck her, like the cracking of a whip. Dragged to one side, the bicycle canted under her and collapsed. Françoise pitched forward, scraping the skin from her hands and elbows.

She struggled to her feet, smearing the blood from her hands to her face, as she tried to wipe the dust from her eyes. Then, leaning against

the wind, she fought her way on, forgetful of her pain and the fury of the storm.

Grey clouds scurried across the sky, above the moors, as if heaven had been seized with panic. The heather and tall dry grass seemed to tremble with fear. "Never mind," thought Françoise. "I shall rest in his arms."

At last she caught sight of the ruin of the Wolf That Was Hanged. She looked anxiously at her watch: half past four.

"I am coming!" she cried into the wind.

She turned off the road, slipped down from her bicycle, and ran headlong across the field, lunging through the furze that snatched at her clothes and tore her skin.

As she drew near, she caught sight of the shafts of a carriage, propped against the gate of the abandoned farm. It was the tilbury.

"He is there," she thought, "he is there. . . . Thank God!"

She hurried through the entrance.

"Hoo-oo! hoo-oo!" she called softly.

There was no answer.

"Hoo–oo! . . . hoo–oo! . . ."

She paused in the thistle-grown courtyard and listened. She heard only the tinkle of a broken window-pane, rattled in its casement by the wind.

A sudden, childish terror crept over her.

"Ivan! . . ." she called, in a strangled voice.

Nothing. Nobody.

With a final rush of energy, she threw herself on the half-open door, and stumbled into the one room of the building. It was empty.

Under the blackened arch of the fireplace, a log fire still smouldered. In front of the hearth, two cushions from the carriage were dented where some one had been stretched out on them. Fresh tobacco smoke hung in the air and a fragrance of amber rose from the few drops that had been sprinkled on the carefully swept tiles; an empty bottle had rolled into the corner.

"I am too late," sobbed Françoise, "I am too late!"

Yet it seemed to her that the room was still warmed by his presence; the gold-tipped ciga-

rette butts that littered the hearth were only too familiar to her.

She sank on the cushions and pressed her aching body into the hollow he had made.

"Ivan," she moaned. "Oh, my poor Ivan! . . ."

It was love that she was calling to. But love never retraces its steps.

About this same time, a dusty traveller, dangling a valise in one hand, straggled into the station at Puçay.

It was a little station, dropped down as if by accident on the edge of the forest. Ferns grew along the platform and heather pushed up through the gravel between the tracks. A sylvan air hung about the lamp-posts. It would have made a perfect place for any station-master who loved botany.

The stranger sat down on a bench against the wall in the waiting-room. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes sunk in deep rings; he seemed to be exhausted, and the sighs he gave surely came from some overwhelming grief.

When the ticket window opened, the clerk

leaned out and asked the man what he wanted.

"I?" he said.

"Yes, you. Where are you going?"

"Where am I going? . . ."

He lifted his head, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. The walls were lined with coloured posters: Chenonceaux, the valley of the Gartempe, the Gorge of Padirac.

"Where am I going?" he repeated. "Well . . ."

The clerk waited impassively behind the grating for this strange traveller to make up his mind.

"Well . . ." he said reflectively, running his eye once more over the posters, "where does the next train go?"

"Azay, Ballan, Saint-Pierre-des-Corps; change there for Nantes, Bordeaux, and Paris."

"Paris. . . ."

At this word, the traveller seemed to come to a decision. He drew out a thin, worn pocket-book and counted over the few bank-notes that it held.

"How much to Paris?"

"Austerlitz station: sixty-two francs twenty."

"Third class?"

"Third class."

Once more he counted the notes, and then a handful of change, which he assembled from his pockets.

"Well?" said the clerk.

"Well . . . I'll think it over," said the traveller.

He picked up his valise, left the station, and set off along the first path he came on, his head down, his back dwindling gradually in a little flurry of dust raised by the wind.